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SERMONS

FOR EVERY

SUNDAY AND FESTIVAL

OF THE YEAR.

Chiefly taken from the

SERMONS OF M. MASSILLON,

BISHOP OF CLERMONT.

BY THE

REV. EDWARD PEACH.

Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.—
Luke xi. 28.

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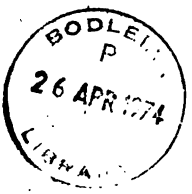
BODLEI
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26 APR 1974

PREFACE.

IT is a subject of general astonishment and regret, that the English Catholic has never been presented with a translation of the sermons of Massillon. The applause, with which they were received on the Continent, is the most unequivocal proof of their merit. His sermons for Lent were preached, with unparalleled, and undiminished success, twenty years successively, before a most voluptuous court, and before one of the most polished audiences in the christian world; and the whole of his works have been, from the time of their pub-

lication, the delight and admiration of the pious, and well-informed in every country, where the French language is understood. This is the greatest commendation which can be adduced in favour of works of this kind. An inferior preacher may sometimes attract attention; and unless his merit be eclipsed by the lustre of superior genius, may maintain his reputation for a time, and receive the flattering applause of the public; but the power of extorting the admiration, and rivetting the attention of the most voluptuous, the most irreligious, the most fickle votaries of pleasure, is a talent possessed by few: and to be held up as a model of spiritual eloquence even after death by men of all nations and religions, is an honour which is attended only by

extraordinary merit. This distinguished pre-eminence was due to the talents of Massillon: and is acknowledged as candidly by the learned Protestant as by the Catholic.

Never, perhaps, was there a christian orator who possessed a more perfect knowledge of the heart of man. He insinuates himself into its inmost recesses: he explores, and lays open every avenue to public inspection. He delineates the affections, describes the first causes of the corruption, and displays the inward workings of the mind with such precision and clearness, that every individual who has departed from the ways of virtue beholds as exact a delineation of his own features, as if the picture had been designed for him alone.

In the arrangement of his discourses, Massillon attends more to sentiments than words. He prepares his audience for hearing plain truths by a short exposition of his subject; and, instead of demonstrating the existence of the law, or the necessity of implicitly submitting to its injunctions, of which he supposes that his auditory is already convinced, he immediately proceeds to combat the pretexts which the violators of it alledge in justification of their conduct.

The style of Massillon is animated, chaste, and flowing; and, although dignified and worthy of the christian pulpit, it is simple and adapted to the understanding of the unlearned. The liveliness of his imagination adorns it sufficiently to please the man of taste and education: but

he rejects those decorations which contribute only to throw a veil over the subject, and to raise it above the comprehension of the multitude. He studies not to please the ear, but to convey instruction, and reform the profligate. He admits only the grand, and sublime conceptions, which elevate the soul, and fix her attention immoveably on the important truths which he announces.

Every sentiment is illustrated, and enforced by the authority of the scriptures. The similitudes, and the quotations, which he adduces from the inspired writings, are never sought after; they always rise from the subject, and immediately strike, sometimes by the novelty, and always by the justness of their application.

An orator of such distinguished

talents, eloquence, and piety, could not fail of success. It is, therefore, unnecessary to add, that his audience was always absorpt in attention, that the just were comforted, the tepid undeceived, and the wicked confounded. When he delivered his sermon *on the small number of the Elect* before the voluptuous court of Versailles, the powers of his eloquence were manifested in the most extraordinary manner. So completely was the imagination of this august assembly affected by his awful description, that, at length, terrified, and struck as it were by an electric shock, they started involuntarily from their seats, and by their loud and continued murmurs of astonishment, and applause, obliged him for a time to desist: he however was not abashed, but concluded his

discourse in the most pathetic and masterly manner. A more wonderful instance of the effects of oratory perhaps is not recorded in history. The fruits, which always accompanied his ministry, were great and lasting. After the conclusion of a discourse, the people did not form themselves into parties in order to canvas its merits and defects; but they all retired in silence, with pensive looks, down-cast eyes, and sorrowful countenances. They thought not of the preacher: their attention was immoveably fixed on the great and sublime truths which he had delivered. These silent commendations, if they may be so called, are more expressive of the merits of an orator, than any public applause. The one only flatters the speaker, and assures him that he has pleased

his auditory; the other imparts the sweetest consolation to his mind, and assures him that he has touched the heart. "I have heard many distinguished orators," said Louis XIV. addressing himself to Massillon when he preached his first Advent before the court in the year 1702, "I have heard many distinguished orators in my chapel, who gave me very great satisfaction, but when I hear you I am dissatisfied with myself."

Respecting the doctrine of Massillon, I fear that its severity will be criticised and reproved; for he preaches the gospel in its genuine purity. Like another Jeremiah or Ezekiel, he announces the precepts of the Lord without fear, and without disguise. He knows that the laws of the gospel are unalterable, and that every letter must be ful-

filled in the last age of Christianity, as well as in the first. He refuses to make any composition with the tepid and slothful degeneracy of the times; because, in the first place, he had received no authority for that purpose; and secondly, because the mercies of the Lord were extended to their utmost limits, when he consented to receive us into favour on the fulfilment of the conditions contained in the scriptures. — He is, therefore, severe: but he is severe because the gospel is severe; because his duty compelled him to be severe.

In the exercise, however, of his painful ministry, he is actuated by that charity, which seeks not only the instruction, but the salvation of men. He displays the most rigid precepts of the gospel in the most

engaging colours; and he exposes the follies and pleasures of the world in a light that is calculated to create aversion and disgust. He exhibits the just man adorned with honour and glory, and happy in the sweet enjoyments of peace and innocence: and he represents the sinner covered with ignominy and shame, and tortured by the never-dying worm of anxiety and remorse. Under his pencil the character of the just man assumes a new and surprising lustre. He comes forth in all his native greatness, the champion of truth and justice, the brave and valiant soldier of Jesus Christ, patiently enduring the fatigues of the christian warfare, encountering with joy every obstacle that opposes him, and finally subduing all the enemies of his soul, the world, the flesh, and the devil; the

sinner, on the other hand, appears in the attitude and dress of a listless, ignominious coward, whose only delight is sensual pleasure, whose courage fails at the first call to arms, and who shrinks with terror when he is summoned to quit the bed of ease, and encounter the enemies of his salvation. The features of the true Christian appear dignified and composed, and the enjoyments which give pleasure to his manly soul, rational, noble, and sublime: the features of the sinner, on the other hand, appear relaxed by luxury, and distorted by solicitude and fear, and the pleasures which excite the longings of his noble soul, disgusting, momentary, unworthy of a rational being, and productive of misery both in this world and the next.——In this manner the pious and eloquent

Massillon softens and decks with charms the severities of God's law. He compels the sinner to acknowledge the folly and madness of a sinful life: he instils into his mind a hatred and disgust of the cruel tyrant under whose despotism he has languished so long: he convinces him that sin is the fatal enemy of his peace, and he describes in such plain and energetic terms his blindness, ingratitude, and misery, that he is in a manner constrained to throw himself into the arms of piety, as the only means of asserting the dignity of his nature, and of acquiring peace and happiness, as well here, as hereafter.

The English Catholic has reason to regret that the works of this celebrated ornament of the pulpit have been so long concealed from him. A

regular and well executed translation would be a valuable addition to the libraries of the learned, and would undoubtedly meet with encouragement from the enlightened and wealthy part of the community. But the difficulties of the undertaking, the price which would be required for the purchase of so large a work, and the certainty, that the immoderate length of the sermons, and their being chiefly confined to Lent and Advent, would operate against the constant perusal of them by the great body of the people, are reasons which, I apprehend, will deter every man of abilities equal to the task from attempting the execution. In order, however, that some benefit may be derived from this treasure of sacred eloquence, the present work is respectfully offered to the public.

It cannot properly be called a translation. It is a collection of pious and enlightened discourses, drawn up after the manner to which the English reader is habituated, and appropriated to the Sundays and festivals of the year.

The substance is taken from Massillon, with the exception sometimes of part, and sometimes of the whole of the introduction and conclusion; instructions to the lower classes are sometimes substituted in the place of the numerous addresses to the court, which abound in the original; and occasional hints at the times, and the situation of the country are inserted. — Sometimes two discourses are formed out of one; at other times, one part only is taken; and at others the whole is abridged. At all times, the division, the arrange-

ment, the subject (with the exceptions mentioned above) are Massillon's; and his method is followed as closely as the nature of the work would permit.

It is not presumed that a circumscribed selection like this will be worthy of the reputation of Massillon: it could not be expected: it was not hoped for. The passionate admirers of eloquence, who prefer the nice arrangement of words and sentences before objects of higher importance, may perhaps be dissatisfied with this imperfect display of the abilities of this celebrated preacher, and exclaim against the hand that has dared to violate the integrity of such wonderful specimens of oratory: but the sincere lovers of piety, it is presumed, will applaud the attempt, notwithstand-

ing the imperfect manner in which it is executed; and above all, a pleasing hope is entertained that it will meet with the approbation of HIM, whose honour and glory alone it was intended to promote.

Birmingham,
July 11*th*, 1807.

ERRATA.

Page	Line		
108	13,	*for* duties,	*read* deities.
221	5,	*for* confound,	*read* confounded.
239	7,	*for* the inmost,	*read* and lays open the inmost.
416	22,	*for* condition,	*read* constitution.
488	13,	*for* same state,	*read* same sense.

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FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

ON THE LAST DAY.

And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud in great power and majesty. . . . . Luke xxi. 27.

THUS, my beloved friends, shall the revolutions and kingdoms of this world be brought to a conclusion for ever.—Thus shall end all the earthly pursuits, which either amused us by their novelty, or seduced us by their charms.—Thus shall the Son of Man come.—Thus shall be ushered in the great day of his manifestation, the beginning of his reign, the com-

plete redemption of his mystical body. —On this day the consciences of all mankind shall be exposed to view: a day of calamity and despair to the sinner, but of peace, of joy, and consolation to the just: on this day the eternal lot of the whole world shall be decided.

The constant recollection of these great truths animated the primitive Christian with patience in persecution, and inspired him with joy in the midst of sufferings and contempt.—It was this that supported the courage of the martyrs, invigorated the constancy of virgins, and rendered sweet and agreeable to the recluse, the dreary paths of solitude and retirement.—You yourselves, perhaps, have sometimes felt sentiments of compunction and fear, on the recollection of what will come to pass on this day. But these sentiments were probably of short continuance: thoughts of a more cheerful na-

ture soon effaced them from your mind, and restored you to your former tranquillity.——In the first ages it would have been deemed a kind of apostacy, not to have sighed after the day of the Lord. The thought of this great event was a subject of consolation to these primitive disciples: the apostles were obliged to moderate the eager desires which they expressed for its arrival. —But in these times, the church is obliged to call forth all the powers of her ministry to impress the thought of this awful day on the minds of the faithful: not indeed with the expectation of exciting within them the same holy and devout impatience for its speedy accomplishment,—that, I apprehend, is no longer possible,—but with the hopes of awakening them to repentance by the fear, and consternation, which all must feel, who are sensible of the alternative that awaits them in the winding up of these general ac-

counts, in the last trying scene of this awful and terrible catastrophe.

It is not my intention in this discourse to display the external terrors of this great day; I mean, the confusion of the elements, the irregular motions of the heavenly bodies, the universal destruction of nature, and men withering away through fear: I shall confine myself to a subject more adapted to make a salutary impression on the minds of my audience; I shall confine myself solely to the consideration of what will naturally present itself to view on the opening of the book of conscience, when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed.—Man, during his abode in this world, knows not his own heart: self-love spreads a veil over his imperfections, and conceals the knowledge of his true state, both from himself, and from others. But on this day he shall be seen in his true dress, both by himself, and by all

mankind.—The just man is disregarded, and despised in this world: he is subjected in a great measure to the will of the sinner; his life is esteemed folly, and his end without honour. He, likewise, shall be seen in his true light on this day, and shall be honoured before the whole world with that honour to which his merits are entitled. —I purpose, therefore, to make a few reflections on the confusion which shall seize the wicked, when the secrets of their hearts shall be revealed; and on the glory and honour which the just shall receive, when their secret virtues and good works shall be fully manifested.

1. It would be presumption to pretend to describe in appropriate terms the qualities of the Great Judge, who shall preside on that awful day.—He is a severe lawgiver, who is jealous of the sanctity of his laws, and who will judge you by them alone. All extenuations,

all favourable interpretations, which custom or worldly wisdom have introduced, will then disappear; and the advantages, which the sinner appeared to derive from them, will end in nothing.—He is a judge, highly interested in the glory of his Father against the sinner: and on this day he will display his zeal for the honour of the Divinity, against those who have refused him the just tribute of adoration and glory.—He is a Saviour, whose sacred wounds will severely rebuke you for your ingratitude, and whose blood will raise its voice, and loudly demand your condemnation.—He is the searcher of hearts, to whose eyes every thing is open, even the most secret thoughts.—In a word, he is a God of power and majesty, before whom the heavens will pass away, the elements be dissolved, all nature be in confusion, and the sinner, the sinner alone, be obliged to sustain the terrors of his

presence, and the rigour of his examination.

The particulars of this dreadful examination will, in the first place, be the same for all. Difference of times, of ages, of countries, of birth, and disposition, will be totally disregarded; and as the gospel, by which you will be judged, is the same for all ages and states, and proposes the same rules of conduct to the strong and to the weak, to the king and to the subject, to the hermit and to the worldling, to the primitive Christian, and to the Christian of the present times, there will be no distinction in the mode of examination. No attention will be paid to excuses of rank, of birth, of the dangers of particular states, of the customs of the world, of weakness of constitution: but the same rigorous account of chastity, of humility, of modesty, of constant vigilance, of forgiveness of injuries, of self-denial, of mortifica-

tion, and of all other christian virtues, will be exacted from the poor and from the rich, from the prince and from the people, from the learned and from the unlearned, from the primitive and from the modern Christian.

In the second place, this examination will be universal; that is, it will include every circumstance of your lives. It will include the failings of your younger years, which probably have long since escaped your memory; —the indiscretions of youth, almost every hour of which was perhaps stained with crimes;—the desires and cares of more advanced years;—the peevishness and insensibility of old age.—— With what surprise will the sinner perceive, when the different stages of his life are thus passed in review before his eyes, that through the whole course he was profane, dissolute, sensual, without piety, without repentance, without good works: that he busied

himself in the different situations of life, to no other purpose than to heap up to himself a more abundant treasure of wrath; and that he lived as if all were to have ended with his mortal existence.

In this life we never behold the true state of our interior: our attention is engaged by the few serious sentiments with which we are occasionally animated; and the judgment which we form of ourselves, is generally influenced by the last impressions which are made on our minds.—A few thoughts of salvation, with which God inspires us from time to time;—a day, for instance, spent in the exercises of piety, causes us to forget many years spent in the pursuits of vice;—and the declaration of our crimes at the tribunal of penance, blots them out from our remembrance, and restores us to as perfect a state of tranquillity, as if we had never committed them. But before this

terrible Judge all will appear at once: our whole lives will be exposed to view. Every motion of our hearts, from the first developement of reason, to the last moment of existence, will be manifested: the long catalogue of crimes, committed during the different stages of life, will be all collected together: not an action, not a desire, not a thought, not a word will be omitted; for if the hairs of our head are numbered, with greater reason are our works. —Then shall you see the true state of your souls: then shall their secret avenues, their hidden affections, their depraved appetites, be all laid open to your view: then shall their unlawful desires, their hatreds and animosities, their vitiated and impure intentions, their criminal projects, which were overlooked because they proved abortive, and all their other vices, be displayed before you. "Oh! says St. Bernard, crimes without number will

burst suddenly upon the sight, as from a secret hiding place, of which we never thought that we were guilty*." We shall see what we never saw before—we shall see our true selves: the dark abyss shall be enlightened, and the mystery of iniquity shall be revealed.—After the scrutiny into our transgressions is concluded, the Judge will enter into a strict examination of the good works which we ought to have performed, but have neglected. Here again we shall find that our whole lives have been chequered with sins of omission, of which we never thought of repenting: so many opportunities, for instance, which, through complaisance, through fear of offending, through interest, or other motives, we suffered to escape in silence, when our character required that we should have vindicated the honour of God, and the cause of virtue and truth:—so many

* Quasi ex improviso, et quasi ex insidiis.—*St. Ber.*

occasions of promoting the spiritual welfare of our neighbour, by example, or by other means, which we have neglected:—so many favourable moments suffered to pass by through indolence or indifference, when we might have prevented crimes in others, by seasonable advice, and by prudent remonstrances:—so many days, so many moments wasted away in idleness and sloth, which might have been devoted, without any inconvenience, to the great affair of salvation. Ah! my beloved, this was the time which we called the most innocent period of our lives:—a time, which, if it was not distinguished by any good works, we considered, at least, as totally void of evil.—— With what regret will the sinner look back on that length of days, which he sacrificed to trifles, and to a world that is no more, when he reflects that, had he consecrated them to the service of God, he might have merited heaven!

With what confusion will he recollect the humiliations, the labours and crosses to which he submitted for the acquisition of wealth, of a fortune which he could possess only for an instant, when he is convinced that one half, or even a quarter of the same trials, endured for the sake of Christ, would have placed him for ever at rest in the secure enjoyment of God's eternal kingdom.

After this, we shall be called to account for all the graces which we have abused;—for the many calls and inspirations which we have neglected;—for the little profit which we reaped from the powerful exhortations of his ministers;—for the improper use which we made of the sufferings and afflictions, with which he was pleased to visit us for our improvement in good;—for the many gifts of nature, which ought to have been devoted to the works of piety, but which we made the instruments of vice.—Ah! if the unprofita-

ble servant was cast into outer darkness, because he merely buried his talent, what favour can they expect, who have received so many talents, and have employed them all against the Giver?

The account, which we shall here be called upon to give, will be terrible in the extreme. Christ will demand back again at our hands the price of his blood.—We are sometimes inclined to complain, that God has not done enough for us; that we are naturally inclined to evil; that we cannot soften down the harshness of our temper and disposition; and that he has not given us sufficient grace to resist the occasions of sin to which we are exposed. But at the last day, we shall clearly perceive that our whole lives were one continued abuse of his favours and graces; we shall see that, preferably to so many nations, whom he has left in the darkness of infidelity, we were

favoured with the light of faith, fed with his holy word, and with his sacraments, and supported by his inspirations and graces.—Yes: you will be astonished to see how much God has done for you, and how little you have done for him. Your complaints will be turned into confusion, which will terminate in despair.

Hitherto, beloved Christians, the examination has extended to those sins only which the sinner has committed in his own person. But when the Sovereign Judge shall proceed to investigate the sins which we have occasioned in others, what an immense multitude will be again presented to our view! We shall behold, assembled before our eyes, all the souls to whom we have been the occasion of sin; all the souls who have, either by our words, by our counsels, by our example, by our solicitations or impurities, been seduced from the paths of virtue, and con-

demned to hell; all the souls, whose faith we have shaken, whose piety we have weakened, whose libertinism we have encouraged.—Yes: our Lord Jesus, to whom they belonged, and who had bought them with his precious blood, will require them at our hands as his inheritance—as a conquest which we have wrested from him—as his children, whom we have murdered.—Ah! if he marked Cain with the seal of reprobation on account of the blood of his brother, with what seal will he mark the sinner, when he shall demand an account of the souls whom he has murdered, and consigned to the second and eternal death?

In this manner will our whole souls be exposed to view.—Happy, exclaims St. Augustin, should we be, if we could open our eyes, and behold the state of our interior as clearly now as we shall behold it then.—Truly, my beloved, could we divest ourselves of

those prejudices which cloud our sight, —could we resist the influence of those examples, which encourage us in our delusions,—could we be convinced of the falsity of those maxims and customs, which tranquillize our consciences,—could we measure by the standard of truth, the faculties and talents on which we pride ourselves,—could we renounce that self-love, which is the root of all our evils,—and could we, by these means, see ourselves in the same light in which we are seen of God, what a holy hatred should we conceive against ourselves!—How strenuously should we endeavour to humble ourselves in his sight, during the days of our mortality, in hopes of avoiding the humiliations of that day, when the secrets of all hearts shall be laid open, and made manifest to the whole world.

2. Let us, however, turn to a more cheerful subject, and describe the ex-

amination of that happy few, of which we all hope to form a part.

Two things, which, according to appearances, are inconsistent with the idea of infinite justice, may be said to be unavoidable in the indiscriminate society of the good and the bad. 1st, Concealed crimes escape the public censure which they deserve, and hidden virtue is deprived of the applause to which it is entitled. 2dly, The sinner is oftentimes raised to honours and dignities, whilst the just man is obliged to tread the lowly paths of subjection and submission to his orders.—— On this great day, these evils shall be fully rectified. The sinner shall be separated from the just, as soon as the book of conscience is displayed: and the honours and dignities of the heavenly Jerusalem shall be conferred on the deserving—the true and faithful servants of the Lord.

What a consolation will it be to the

just, to have the secrets of their hearts finally revealed! Their perfections were concealed from men in this world. They were known to God alone. They were unknown even to themselves; for humility had concealed from their view the beauty and innocence of their interior, and had displayed before their eyes only the few blemishes and imperfections to which human nature is unavoidably exposed.—But now the veil shall be withdrawn, and their secret storehouse of merits shall be thrown open to the inspection of all.—With what astonishment will the great assembly of the sons of men behold the triumps of these humble servants of God! their hitherto concealed victories over the world, the flesh, and the devil;——their heroic sacrifices—their fervent desires—their tender sighs—their transports of love—their faith—their humility—their magnanimity—their greatness of soul—their perfect contempt

for all those false and fleeting vanities on which the hopes and desires of worldlings are so constantly fixed. Then shall it be seen, and acknowledged, that nothing created has so just a title to praise and admiration, as the just man. Then shall it be seen, and acknowledged, that the interior exploits of the true Christian are more sublime, and more noble, than all the great transactions of the world; that they alone are worthy to be recorded in the book of life; and that, in the estimation of God himself, they exhibit a spectacle more worthy of the admiration of angels and men, than all the boasted victories and conquests which swell the pages of history; the memory of which has been immortalized by pompous monuments, but which shall now be considered as the effects of a puerile and barbarous ambition, and as the horrid fruits of pride and vain-glory.—Thus, the evil com-

plained of in the first instance, will be entirely removed, and things will be restored to their proper order. The guilty will not triumph; will not escape the general opprobrium, nor the punishment which is due to their crimes: and an ample recompence will be given to the just man, in the clear and distinct view of an astonished and admiring universe.

The second evil is the prosperity of the wicked, and the adversity of the good.—The just man, as if of no more account than the dust from which he sprang, and as if resembling the basest metals passing in the progress to refinement through the fiery ordeal of tribulation, is, not unfrequently, the lowest and most contemptible of his species; whilst the sinner is exalted like the cedar of Lebanon, and surrounded by all that riches and honours can procure. This, in appearance, is contrary to order and justice. But, although

by this means the just are purified, and the wicked hardened; although this confused mixture of good and evil enters into the designs of Providence, and the just and unjust are hastened to their destination by ways which are inscrutable to man: nevertheless, it is necessary that the Son of God should rectify all things; that he should publicly manifest the distinction which exists between good and evil, between the man who serves the Lord, and the man who denies him. This will be effected on the great day of the Lord: order will be perfectly established: the good will be separated from the wicked: these will be placed on the right hand, the others on the left.

Then shall the Son of Man, from his exalted throne in the clouds of heaven, cast his eyes over the immense multitude of peoples and nations assembled before him. Then shall he collect his chosen people from the four

corners of the earth: then shall he unite together the true children of Israel: then shall he introduce to notice, and celebrate the exploits of heroes of religion, hitherto unknown to the world. The different epochs, or stated periods of time, he will distinguish, not by the victories of warriors, not by the rise or fall of empires, but by the particular triumphs of his grace, by the victories of the just man over his passions, by the establishment of his reign in the heart, by the invincible constancy of a persecuted disciple. He will entirely change the order of things: he will create a new heaven and a new earth: he will reduce this infinite variety of peoples, of nations, of titles, dignities, and states, to two different orders or descriptions of men—to the elect of God, and to the reprobate. The one shall be placed on his right hand, the other on the left.

What a terrible separation, my be-

loved brethren, will then take place! Father will be separated from son, brother from brother, friend from friend: one shall be taken, the other left. Death, which separates us for a time from the dearest objects of our affections, has thus much, at least, of consolation in it, that hereafter, perhaps, we may be united again. But here, the separation which divides us will be eternal: as far as the east is from the west, or heaven from hell, so far will the just be removed from the reprobate for ever.

All things being thus finally arranged; all mankind thus divided; each one immoveable in the place allotted to him; confusion, dismay, terror, and despair, shall be visible on the countenance of the one, and joy, serenity, and confidence, shall enliven the other: the eyes of the just shall be fixed on the Son of Man, their great and good deliverer; the eyes of the wicked shall

be cast on the earth, penetrating into that dreadful abyss, which in a short moment is to open, and swallow them up for eternity.—Then will the King of Glory, says the gospel, place himself between the two assemblies, and turning to the just on the right, with looks of clemency and love—looks, which alone would repay them for all their past afflictions, he will say to them: *Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,* Matt. xxv. 34. Whilst you lived on earth, you were treated by worldly men as fools, as the outcast of society, and as useless members of the state: but they shall this day be convinced that the world subsisted only for you; that the world was made only for you; and that, as soon as your number was complete, the final dissolution took place. Come, then, my beloved, quit this earth, where you were always

strangers and pilgrims; follow me in the paths of glory and happiness, as you followed me in those of humiliations and sufferings. Your afflictions were momentary, but the reward which awaits you shall be eternal. *Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*

Then turning to the wicked on the left, with eyes flashing with indignation, and with a countenance replete with terrors, with a voice, says the prophet, that shall open the bowels of the abyss, (*Num.* xvi.) he will say, not as on the cross, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,* (Luke xxiii. 34.) but, *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels,* Matt. xxv. 41. You were once the chosen people of my Father, but you are now the accursed: the enjoyments which you preferred before me were false, and mo-

mentary, but your punishment shall be eternal. *Depart from me you cursed into everlasting fire.*—Then the just, triumphantly ascending into the clouds with the Son of Man, will sing to their deliverer: "Thou art just, O Lord, and rich in mercy: thou hast crowned all thy blessings by the recompence which thou now bestowest on our merits."—Then the wicked will curse the Author of their existence, and the day on which they were born; or rather, they will turn their rage against themselves, as the sole authors of their damnation.—Then shall the abyss be opened, and the heavens shall stoop down; —the reprobate shall go into eternal torments,—and the elect into life everlasting.—Afterwards, there will be no further communication between them, The sentence which divides them is irrevocable: and they separate for ever.

After such a description, calculated to make an impression on the most har-

dened, I cannot better conclude than by addressing to you the words, which Moses addressed to the Israelites, after he had represented to them the dreadful threats and the consoling promises which were written in the book of the law: *Children of Israel,* says he, *I this day propose to your choice a blessing or a curse; a blessing, if you fulfil the precepts of the Lord your God: a curse, if you forsake his ways, which I have pointed out to you, in order to follow strange gods,* Deut. xi. 26.——The same do I address to you: it is in your power to choose which of the two you will embrace: you have heard the promises, and the threats: the blessing, and the curse.—You must take part either with the devil and his angels, or with Christ and his elect: there is no alternative here.—I have shewn you the way which leads to heaven, and that which leads to hell. In which of the two will you walk? What would be

your eternal lot, if this instant you were summoned to appear before your Judge? Be on your guard: man dies as he lives. — Dread, therefore, lest death should surprise you in the state of sin. —Forsake the ways of the wicked, and live the life of the just, if you hope to be placed with them on the right, and to accompany them into the regions of a blissful immortality.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

ON THE CONDITIONS AND CONSOLATIONS OF TRUE REPENTANCE.

This is he, of whom it is written: Behold I send my angel before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee. . . . . . Matt. xi. 10.

DURING the sacred time of Advent, the Church invites us, in the most pressing terms, to prepare our souls for the approaching solemnity of the birth of Christ. This is the time, she exclaims, to arise from sleep, because our salvation is nearer than when we first believed: this is the time to do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.—She assumes the office of the precursor: she goes before

the face of the Lord, and by the voice of her ministers solicits us to open our hearts to receive him at this holy time, in order that his arms may be opened hereafter to receive us on the great day of final retribution.

But, beloved Christians, are we prepared to accept these gracious invitations? Are we eager to rush forward to the banks of the Jordan, confessing our sins? Ah! we all listen to the heavenly monitor, but we obey him not. We are more inclined to flatter ourselves with the supposition that we are as perfect as the law of God requires us to be; that we fulfil all the divine commandments with sufficient exactitude; that we comply with our duties, and that we perform every good work which our state of life obliges us to perform: we are more inclined, I say, to form this favourable opinion of ourselves, than to suppose that the words of the Baptist are addressed to us: *Ye*

vipers, who hath taught you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth worthy fruits of penance, Matt. iii. 7.

But, my beloved, in vain do we endeavour to deceive ourselves.—Truth itself, and the testimony of our own conscience declare that we are sinners, and consequently, that it is our bounden and indispensable duty to reform, and to do penance. None have escaped the general prevarication; and therefore none are exempt from the general precept: *Do penance, for the kingdom of God is at hand,* Matt. iii. 2.

In calling your attention to this subject, I do not mean to enter into any argument on the necessity of repentance—that is a settled point—that is undeniable.—My object is to lay before you the conditions which must accompany your repentance, in order that it may find acceptance with God; and in conclusion, to add a few reflections on the interior delights which

smoothen the rugged paths of self-denial and reformation.

1. Sin is an alienation of the affections from God, and an attempt to extract happiness from the enjoyment of created things, in opposition to the will of the Creator.—The first duty, therefore, of repentance, is to renounce these vain objects of attachment, and to replace our affections on Him, who alone is worthy of them.—To this we are urged, not only by the voice of religion, but by the united voice of reason and experience.—Reason informs us, that that object alone is worthy of our love, which can effectually contribute to our happiness; which can satisfy the cravings of our souls; which can administer to our wants, alleviate our afflictions, and procure us all good. Now, God alone being the author of these inestimable blessings, reason dictates the necessity of fixing our affections solely on him.—Experience has

already convinced us of this truth. During the time that our affections were fixed on earthly things, we always felt a deficiency in our breasts: we perceived that creatures were capricious, false, and inconstant: we saw that our hearts were deluded, and that happiness was not to be found in them.

With the authority, therefore, of religion, reason, and experience on my side, I will boldly proclaim the necessity of fixing your affections, in the very commencement of your repentance, solely on the great Author of your existence, and on the Giver of every good gift: I will confidently assert that you will not persevere in your great work, unless you often open your hearts to the same seraphic flames of love which animated the saints, and endeavour to walk in their footsteps. They are your models, and after them must you form the plan of your new life.

But methinks I hear you say, that if such perfect love be a necessary ingredient of repentance, it is in vain for you to attempt it; and that to require that you walk in the footsteps of the saints, is to require impossibilities. But, my beloved friends, why are you alarmed? Who, and what were the saints? Do you suppose that they were beings of a superior order? or that they possessed qualities which were never implanted in your nature? Far from it. They were men in pursuit of the same happiness as yourselves. They differed in nothing from you, except in fixing on the proper object for their pursuit.—And will you say that you are not susceptible of the same sublime impressions of holy love as they were? You can adhere to creatures with the most ardent warmth of passion; and are you incapable of adhering to the Great Author of All with the same degree of warmth and animation? If this

be true, what are we to infer? That you were made for vanity and folly: that your hearts are so mean and groveling, that they cannot rise to the love or fruition of any thing beyond the enjoyment of sensual pleasures!—Ah! for God's sake, let not any thing like this ever be said of you! O, do not, do not you subscribe to this assertion! For, if you are not formed for divine love, what is the object of your existence, and for whom were you made? Will you allow, that you were created for no other purpose, than to be the victims of melancholy and delusion? Will you allow, that the Great Author of your existence has drawn you out of nothing, merely to make you miserable? and that your souls are capacitated to enjoy no other happiness than that which eludes your search; than that which, in reality, has no existence?

O man! be no longer the dupe of your own fears.—The fervour of the

saints is not difficult of imitation. Open your eyes: look into your interior; and you will discover that the dispositions, which you consider as obstacles to divine love, are the very dispositions which will promote its reign in your souls.—The more ardent you now are in the pursuit of worldly vanities, the more ardent will you be hereafter in the service of God, and in the pursuit of eternal pleasures.—The more your heart is susceptible of the love of creatures, the easier access will it open to the inspirations of divine grace.—The more haughty, proud, and ambitious you are by nature, the more independently will you serve the Lord, without fear, without human respect, without adulation.—The more pliant, volatile, and inconstant your disposition, the more easy will it be for you to withdraw your misplaced affections, and fix them on God.—In a word, your passions themselves may be made, in a

great measure, the ground-work of your repentance. You may make that, which has hitherto been the cause of your sins, the instrument of your salvation; and you will thus experience, that the heart, which is susceptible of impressions from creatures, is more susceptible of the impressions of divine grace.

2. The first condition, therefore, of true repentance, which is *the love of God*, is necessary, and within your power. The second, which is equally necessary, and which consists in *works of self-denial and mortification*, may be easily practised by the influence which the former will necessarily have over every part of your future conduct.

During the time that you were engaged in sin, you lived in the constant abuse of the gifts of God. Reparation, consequently, must be made to divine justice by the mortification of the senses, and by the voluntary renuncia-

tion of those enjoyments, of which you have made an improper use.

Strictly speaking, the sinner may be said to have lost his right to the blessings of God: he has forfeited his inheritance: he has incurred the malediction of his Creator: he is an anathema in the midst of all the creatures, which God had intended for his use.—There are, therefore, ordinances for the unfaithful, which are not extended to mankind in general. They are excepted from the common right: and they are to judge of the extent of their liberties, not from general maxims, but from the personal exceptions which they have incurred.

On this principle, I will answer a question which is frequently brought forward by false penitents: "Is it unlawful," they ask, "to indulge the fancies of dress, on purpose to engage the attention of others? Is this or that public amusement, this or that inno-

cent enjoyment, forbidden by the gospel ?" I will reply by another question : Have you never criminally abused these liberties ? Have you never made them the occasions of sin ?—Ah ! by means of these very amusements, you have probably heaped up to yourselves treasures of wrath : and now, that you are deliberating on the means of effecting a change of life, you stand up in defence of vanity and folly : now that you are entering on a course of atonement to the divine justice for the numberless offences of your past lives ; when sackcloth and ashes ought to be your only ornament, you maintain the lawfulness of pomp and splendor, and dissipation, from which, whether they are allowable to others or not, you certainly ought, in every view of the case, on principles of conscience and right reason, carefully to restrict yourselves.

Beloved Christians, the sorrows of true repentance hurry away the soul

with precipitation from every thing which has at any time been to her an occasion of sin. She considers not whether *this*, or *that*, be innocent in itself, but whether it has led, or is calculated to lead her into the deep abyss of sin. She entertains as great an abhorrence for the promoters of her crimes, as for the crimes themselves. She avoids the sparks which enkindled her passions, with as much care as she resists the passions themselves. She trembles at the idea of her former irregularities. She abhors the sight of the places, persons, and things which gave occasion to them: she flies from them with haste, lest they should again make an impression on her heart.—Instead, therefore, of maintaining the lawfulness of again corresponding with the objects and occasions of your former sins, you must hate, you must fly from them as from a pestilence. You must shun the rocks, on which you

have already suffered shipwreck. Necessity compels you: for, be assured, if you continue to love the danger, you will infallibly perish in it.

Moreover, in the same manner as concupiscence embraces every opportunity of indulging its unlawful propensities, so, likewise, the true penitent endeavours on every occasion to satisfy the divine justice by private mortifications. He sacrifices on the altar of penance every thing that flatters the senses, every thing that cherishes the passions, and every superfluity that tends only to strengthen the empire of self-love. Like a two-edged sword, he reaches unto the division of the soul and the spirit: he makes separations the most painful to flesh and blood; he cuts even to the quick, and retrenches every thing that favours the inclinations of corrupt nature: he is ingenious in his modes of penance: in every occurrence of life, he discovers

means of contributing to the expiation of his former sins: even the few amusements, which he allows himself, he changes into acts of virtue, by the pious circumspection with which he indulges them.

This, beloved Christians, is the heavenly secret of repentance. ——Now let me exhort you to compare your system of a penitent life, with the model which I have displayed.—Do not deceive yourselves.—It is in vain that you have put off the defiled garments of grosser sensualities, unless you renounce likewise the love of pomp and vanity,—unless you have resolution to mortify your will, and repress the insatiable desires of self-love.—Ah! seldom is there a true penitent! Imperfect and superficial conversions are frequent: but there is too much reason to fear that the greater number of those, who appear reformed in the eyes of the world, will carry with them to the

great tribunal of God hearts as much attached to vanity, and as corrupt in their affections, as they were in the midst of their irregularities.

In order to settle your reform of life on the most solid basis, you must apply diligently to the practice of the opposite virtues.—If you have been addicted to gaming, vanity, or love of dress, your dissipated state of mind must be reformed by prayer, retirement, and works of mercy.—If you have strengthened the empire of flesh and blood, by abandoning yourselves to the more disgraceful passions, the flames of impurity and intemperance must be extinguished by degrees by fasts, austerities, watchings, and the heavy yoke of self-denial and penance.—This is not a matter of counsel; it is of precept. Your happiness depends upon it, your perseverance depends upon it: for your old attachments will incessantly shoot forth, and

spring up again, if they be not entirely eradicated from your breasts. Your passions will become more violent, and will redouble their attacks, unless they are completely subdued. You will be in momentary danger of another shipwreck. You will enjoy neither peace nor consolation in your new life. Your weakness and pusillanimity will increase. The pleasures which you have renounced, will appear before your eyes in the most engaging colours, and the charms of piety and holiness will appear faded, and uninviting.—Thus will you be a constant temptation to yourselves; and, as it is not easy to maintain a contest against yourselves for any length of time, you will soon turn away with disgust from a life which costs you so dear.—It is true, therefore, my dear friends, and let me entreat you to reflect seriously on what I am about to say: it is true, that in proportion as you increase and multi-

ply your sacrifices on the first commencement of a reform of life, you diminish the difficulties; and that, in proportion as you favour your former disorderly inclinations, instead of mitigating the rigours of repentance, you make them more disgusting and intolerable.

A change of life, therefore, consists not merely in a reformation of your past disorders, but in a reformation accompanied with suitable acts of atonement to the divine justice. This is indispensable; and, notwithstanding the contrary opinion which you have probably formed on this head, it is not attended with much difficulty. The graces and consolations of heaven sweeten the bitter pains of mortification and penance, and encourage the soul to proceed with alacrity and rapidity in the important task, until she shall have brought it to a happy termination.—I will conclude with a few words on this subject.

3. Come to me, says our Saviour, all you who are wearied in the ways of iniquity: come, and taste the sweets of my yoke, and you shall find that peace and rest, which you have sought in vain under the yoke of your passions: you shall find rest for your souls.

Yes, beloved Christians; instead of that inconstancy, and ingratitude, which you have experienced from creatures; instead of that emptiness, and puerility, which accompanied your worldly pleasures; instead of that anxiety, solicitude, and remorse, which were the attendants of dissipation, your souls will overflow with the most enrapturing delights of innocence and peace. With what interior joy will you exclaim: "Hitherto I have lived only for vanity. The days, the years, the afflictions that are past, are now as nothing: they are lost: they are obliterated even from the memory of

that world, for which alone I have lived. My civilities, my condescensions, my services, have been repaid only with ingratitude. — But now, every thing that I shall either do or suffer for Jesus, will be placed to account: every act of self-denial, every trivial sacrifice, every sigh, every tear will be registered in indelible characters in the book of life; they will be all recorded in the memory of the great Master whom I serve; they will be all, notwithstanding the deficiencies arising from the weakness of human nature, they will be all purified by the blood of my Redeemer: my merits, indeed, will be nothing, independently of his grace; but he will crown his own gifts with an infinite reward.—I live now for eternity alone: I no longer labour in vain: my life is no more a dream." ——Could you, my beloved brethren, taste the ineffable consolations which this soliloquy imparts to the penitent

saint, you would be enraptured; you would exclaim in concert with all the holy servants of God: "Piety is a treasure indeed! The man who is truly converted to the Lord, receives an hundred-fold even in this life, for the sacrifices which he immolates on the altar of repentance."

I will not, however, pretend to assert, that the true penitent is entirely free from uneasiness and solicitude: experience proves the contrary; and therefore I acknowledge, that the recollection of his past disloyalties will, sometimes, throw a gloom over his mind. But, notwithstanding his incertitude whether he be worthy of love, or hatred, the secret peace which reigns within, gives testimony that Jesus is there; and the ineffable interior delights which he enjoys, convince him that God has received him again into favour. —— I acknowledge, likewise, that the lively ideas of the infinite jus-

tice of God, and of the multitude of his sins, will sometimes excite apprehension and alarm. But these are trials, sent only for the exercise of his humility, and are, consequently, of short duration: he quickly hears the voice of Jesus in his soul: "*Oh! thou of little faith, why dost thou doubt?* Have I not given thee sufficient proofs of my protection and benevolence? Recal to mind all that I have done, in order to snatch thee from the abyss of perdition. I seek not with such earnestness the sheep that is not dear to me. I never should carry it on my shoulders with such patience, if I intended that it should perish before my eyes. Mistrust not my goodness. Thy only motives for alarm, are thy own tepidity and inconstancy."

This, beloved Christians, is but a faint description of the pleasures which enliven the paths of virtue.—Why then will you hesitate?—Are you re-

strained by the fear of difficulties?—Ungenerous souls! You have endured the anguish and remorse of sin without complaint for many years; and is it possible that you should dread the holy sorrows of repentance? — You have borne the yoke of the world—a yoke which admitted neither of ease, nor of comfort, nor of real pleasure; and will you dare to call the yoke of the Lord insupportable? Be no longer the dupes of imaginary fears.—The anxieties, and the pains to which you have been accustomed, have prepared you for the sufferings of penance. This apprenticeship will make every thing easy, particularly as your future labours will be accompanied and sweetened by the graces and consolations of heaven.

Good God! having walked so long in the rugged paths of sin, and under the hard tyranny of the world and my passions, is it possible that I should be

unable to walk with thee, under the wings of thy mercy, and supported by thy powerful arm? Art thou then a hard master?—No: the world knows thee not, and therefore it supposes that thou impartest no consolations to thy faithful servants. But we, O Lord, we know thee. We know that thou art the best of Masters, the most tender of Fathers, the most faithful of Friends, the most bountiful of Benefactors. We know that thou wilt pour thy choicest gifts on thy servants during their mortal pilgrimage, and give them a foretaste of that eternal happiness which thou hast prepared for them in heaven.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

ON DELAY OF REPENTANCE.

I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make strait the way of the Lord. . . . . . John i. 23.

THE paternal solicitude of our Jesus, ever attentive to the interests of his beloved creatures, and desirous of ensuring to himself the free, and sole possession of our hearts, continues to invite us, by the mouth of the Baptist, during this time of Advent, to *make strait his ways*, and to remove the impediments which have hitherto obstructed the channel of his graces, and prevented our complete,

and permanent union with him.—These impediments are the crimes which we commit, — the passions by which our unthinking hearts are led astray,— and the occasions of sin, which have so often proved fatal to our innocence. —The means by which alone these impediments can be removed, are a change of heart, and a complete reform of life, accompanied with a true and sincere repentance.

To this gracious invitation he adds threats. He commands his ministers to display before you the miseries which await impenitence, and the dangers of delay: and to declare openly that, *unless you do penance, you shall* inevitably *perish.*

This is not all: he speaks to you in the interior of your souls; "is it not time," he says, "to arise from that abyss of wickedness, in which you have been so long immersed. Why will you not turn your thoughts to your eternal

welfare, and consecrate the short remaining period of your lives to my service, after having devoted so many years to vanity and folly?"

To these importunities of your Creator, what reply do you make? Do you pour forth your soul in acts of thanksgiving for this his paternal, his gratuitous solicitude? Are you resolved to prostrate yourselves at his feet, and declare aloud, that you are ready to embrace the means which he has provided for your deliverance? Alas! this, I fear, is far from being the state of your mind. You are solicitous only to elude his importunities, and to refuse your consent: you say either that you have not sufficient grace to undertake so great a work; or that you are too much engaged in your pursuits to think of a reform of life at the present time.—These, in general, are your pretexts.—To these, therefore, I will call your attention; and I will prove, in the

plainest terms, that they are groundless, that they are injurious to God, and that they are prejudicial in the highest degree to your eternal welfare.

1. It is not uncommon for those sinners, who are determined not to forsake their evils ways, to attempt to justify themselves by alledging the incompetency of man to effect the great work of an entire change of life, by his own powers alone. "A particular grace from God," they say, "is necessary, and indispensably necessary for the success of such an arduous undertaking: happy they who have been favoured with this grace! As for them, they have long waited with anxious expectations of receiving it: but, as yet, it has not pleased God to dispense to them so inestimable a blessing."

Plausible as this pretext may appear, a slight examination will prove that it is unjust on the part of the sinner, injurious to God, and unwarrantable in itself.

If in this assembly, there is any individual whose impenitence is owing to this cause, let me beg the favour of his attention for a few moments.—Christian brother, I allow in the first instance that a true and sincere reformation of life cannot be effected without the grace of God, and if it be true that you have never been blessed with that grace, your impenitence has some excuse. But this is what you cannot assert with justice. If you take a review of your past life, you will be convinced that God favoured you in every stage of it with the most singular graces. He blest you with a happy disposition, and a good heart. He favoured you with the light of faith, provided you with necessary instructors, and nourished you with his sacraments. When you turned your back upon him, and walked in the ways of iniquity, he followed after you with the solicitude of a parent, and importuned you, by his

graces and inspirations, to return to his embraces: he did not suffer your conscience to be hardened in guilt: he convinced you of the emptiness, and vanity of sinful pleasures, and tortured you with anxiety and remorse: he displayed before your eyes the charms of innocence, and by the voice of his ministers, urged you in the most pressing terms to give peace to your soul by throwing yourself into its arms: at the time even that I am speaking, he works within you, and inspires me with these sentiments in order to reclaim you.—Ah! my dear friend, your whole life has been one continued chain of graces; and you will discover hereafter, that it has been your greatest crime to have received so much, and to have profited so little.

If, indeed, by *grace*, you mean that *miraculous grace*, which in a moment converted Paul the persecutor into an apostle, you probably have never yet

received it; and more probably never will: it would be presumption to expect it.—No: you will never receive a grace that will exempt you from difficulties, that will break your chains, and subdue your passions without your concurrence. Your conversion will necessarily cost you dear: you will have many violent struggles with corrupt nature before your evil inclinations are repressed, before you can tear yourselves from the dear, but criminal objects of your affections, and make the sacrifice of every thing that holds you in captivity. The grace, which the saints received, and which made them saints, did not exempt them from these conflicts; and if you wait for a greater grace, before you enter upon the work of self-reformation, you might as well give up your soul for lost, and consign yourself to the horrors of despair.

There is another subject, likewise,

for your consideration: by alledging that you never yet have been favoured with the grace, on which alone a change of life depends, you are guilty of ingratitude against God; and tacitly accuse him of being in some degree the author of your impenitence. You might as well say in plain terms: "God alone can change my heart, and, therefore, it is to no purpose that I attempt it without his special concurrence: I must wait his good time: I have only to spend my days agreeably in pleasure and sin; and when he thinks proper, he will divest me of the old man, and clothe me with the new, without any labour on my part, without my thinking of it, without any previous disposition, but a life of wickedness, and opposition to his graces: salvation — that great, that only business for which I came into the world, is no longer entrusted to me: the Lord has reserved the means, and taken it entirely on

himself."—But, my friend, let me ask, in what new gospel is this promise contained, for it is not in the gospel of Jesus Christ? Ah! with reason does the prophet exclaim: the sinner can speak only foolish things in justification of himself, and he will endeavour to extenuate his crimes in opposition even to God himself, *Isa.* xxxii. 6.

Lastly, this pretext is irrational in itself.—For what consequence can you deduce, supposing it were true that God had never visited you with his grace? That you would not be accountable for the sins you commit, were you to die impenitent? You dare not say it.—That you are allowed to extend the catalogue of your crimes, till God shall please to touch your heart, and impart to you the long expected grace? That the delay of your repentance will not be criminal in the sight of God, because it depends not on your will?—If this excuse, my dear

friend, were admissible, every sinner, that defers his repentance, and dies in his sins, would be justified; the gates of hell would be shut, and the broad road, in which the multitude are said to walk, would be annihilated. — O man! exclaims the apostle, in opposition to the folly, and impiety of this pretext, O man! is it thus that you despise the riches of the bounty of your God? Are you not aware that his patience in enduring your crimes, ought to be the most cogent motive to hasten your repentance, and not to be alledged as the motive for the continuance of your disorders?

If God had actually refused you the assistance of his grace, the following is the only rational consequence to be deduced; namely, that your eternal welfare is exposed to the most imminent danger, that it is your duty to pray incessantly for the inestimable blessing, of which you are deprived: and

to endeavour, by every means in your power, to appease the anger of God, and, as it were, to take heaven by storm: that it is your duty, in the mean time, to avoid the occasions where your innocence has been so often endangered, and to renounce the worldly affections which have hitherto shut your heart against the inspirations of the Holy Ghost.—This, my dear friend, would be giving glory to God in a truly christian manner: this would be sincerely confessing his supreme dominion over the heart, and acknowledging that he is the Giver of every good gift.—But to be continually repeating, that God will visit you, when in his mercy he shall think fit; and in the mean time, making no efforts to relinquish the error of your ways, is the height of impiety: you might as well say, "I am not inclined at the present moment to enter upon the service of God: I can do without him yet a little longer: I

live happy, and content: when he forces me to attend to his calls, and when I can no longer avoid his solicitations, then I will yield, then I will say, *Lord, here I am:* but in the mean time I will enjoy my good fortune, and indulge the liberty he has given me of deferring my conversion to a future period."—What a preparation is this, my beloved, for receiving that inestimable grace which works a change of heart! Nevertheless, this it is that gives confidence to the sinner, and hardens him in his guilt.

But beware, beloved Christians: the longer you defer your change of life, the less grace you will receive: the more your crimes are multiplied, the farther will God remove himself from you. The moments of mercy flow rapidly on: the dreadful time of indignation approaches: and, if it be true that you have not sufficient grace to effect your change to-day, in a short time

you will probably not have sufficient grace to be sensible that you stand in need of repentance.

2. There is another, and perhaps a more numerous class of sinners, who defer their conversion, not on account of any deficiency of grace, but because they are too much attached to the world; and are deluded by the supposition, that, if they reform their conduct at a later period of life, their salvation will be as secure as if they embraced the austerities of repentance at the present moment.

They say, that they cannot devote their younger years to the severe duties of religion; that their blood is too warm to submit to such multiplied restraints: but that the time will come, when their passions will be cooled, and the pleasures of the world less attractive; and that then they will apply to their eternal concerns in good earnest.

In reply to this pretext, it is natural

to ask; whether you have an absolute assurance that you will reach that time of life; that death will not surprise you, during the course of those years, which you so deliberately devote to your passions; and that the Lord, whom you expect only at the third watch, will not come at the first, or second watch, at a time when you least expect him? Ah! the thousands whom you see drop into the grave in the very prime of life, proclaim the uncertainty of the term of your existence: perhaps, the sentence is even already pronounced against you: *Thou fool! this night*, perhaps, *thy soul will be required of thee:* and, if so, what will thy projects of a future conversion avail thee?

Supposing, however, that you are permitted to reach that advanced stage of life: are you certain that you will be then more disposed to enter upon a new course of life than you are to-day?—Did age change the heart of

Solomon—of Saul—of Jezabel—of Herodias? It was then that their passions mounted to the highest pitch, and that their crimes were multiplied beyond number.—The same, probably, will be your lot: your old age will either be contaminated with the follies of your youth, or, if satiety should create a disgust for the grosser passions, it will be attended with a hardness of heart, and a seared conscience, which will infallibly lead to final impenitence.

However, for the sake of argument, we will suppose that you have received an assurance that you will both attain to old age, and be then sincerely reformed. Nevertheless, can you, my beloved brethren, can you seriously, and deliberately resolve on treating your God in this unworthy, this contemptuous manner? He is the Lord of all ages, and times; he requires that both the bud, the bloom, and the decay of

life be consecrated to him: he is a jealous God: he will not give his glory to another, nor endure a partner in your affections. And can you resolve before hand to devote the most precious part of your life to the devil, and his works, and reserve only the shattered remains for your God? Can you have the hardened boldness to say: "Lord, when I am no longer capable of enjoying the world, I will turn to thee. I shall be always sure of finding thee. But the world, after a certain time, will no longer be an object of amusement. I must enjoy it before it is gone. At a certain age it will reject me; and then, for want of other pleasures, I will turn to thee: thou alone shalt possess my soul."—Worthless creature! with reason may I address to you the words, which the prophet Isaiah addressed to his idolatrous neighbours: You take, says he, a cedar of Lebanon, you choose the best parts for your plea-

sures, and luxuries, and not knowing how to employ the remainder, you carve an image of your idol, and bow down before it, and worship it, *Isa.* xliv. 15. You, in the same manner, select the most precious parts of your life, and devote them to your passions: and not knowing how to employ the wretched remnant, which has become unfit for the world, you make an idol of it, you consecrate it to religion, and vainly flatter yourselves that your offering will be acceptable to God!

Ah! be not deceived, my beloved friends.—You certainly will reap in an advanced age the fruits of that only which you sowed in your youth. If you sow in corruption, says the apostle, you shall reap in corruption, *Gal.* vi. 8. As you live, so shall you die.

You perhaps may say, that happy is the man who has served the Lord from his youth; and that happy

should you have been, if you had enjoyed the same blessing: but, unfortunately, you have followed the beaten tract of the world, and are now engaged in pursuits, from which you cannot desist until a more favourable opportunity arrives.

But, my beloved, are you certain that this favourable opportunity will ever arrive? Are you certain that you will not be surprised by death? Would you be the first that was surprised in his sins? Ah! this is the common lot of all who walk in the broad ways of the world. Could you but attend the minister of the Lord when he is summoned to the bed of sickness: could you hear the useless regrets, the vain protestations of the measures they would have taken, had they foreseen their approaching dissolution, you would be convinced that, seldom is there a man that has completely renounced his passions, and prepared

himself by repentance for his last end. —If you defer you conversion, the same melancholy task shall we have one day to perform for you. You will summon us in your turn: and, instead of congratulating with you on your timely repentance, we shall be necessitated to listen to your useless regrets, and endeavour, perhaps in vain, to inspire you with sentiments of sincere sorrow; and engage you to look forward with hope to the result of that dreadful scrutiny, for which you intended to have been prepared, and are not.

Perhaps, however, you may say, that you are disposed, at the present time, to reform your lives; that you are fully convinced of the emptiness, and folly of worldly pleasures, and would gladly renounce them in order to labour in earnest for your salvation; but that you are diffident; that you are afraid lest the difficulties, necessarily attending such an important, and arduous

undertaking, should discourage you; and that, if you make the attempt, and fail, you would be exposed to the ridicule, and scorn of all your acquaintance.

But, my dear friends, whence originates this fear? You defer your repentance on the supposition, that God will touch your heart at a future period: and, if you reform to-day, you say that you dare not rely on his assistance! You confide in his mercies at the time you offend him; and you cannot confide in them when you attempt to serve him! O man! where is that reason, that soundness of judgment on which you pride yourselves? Are you then only senseless, and contradictory, when your salvation is at stake?

Would it not be more reasonable to say: "I will begin at least: I will try what I can do with the help, and assistance of God: the experiment is cer-

tainly worth making."—The man who is surprised by the sudden torrent, and in danger of perishing, endeavours to reach the land, and does not give himself up for lost, until his strength is exhausted. He does not say: "Perhaps I shall not succeed; my strength may possibly fail me; and therefore I will not try to save myself." No: he exerts his whole strength; he stretches every nerve; he yields not, till he is fairly overpowered by the force of the torrent that opposes him.—You, my friends, are in danger of perishing: the waters gain upon you: the torrent is carrying you away: and will you hesitate whether it be prudent to endeavour to save yourselves? Will you sacrifice to deliberation the few moments which alone remain for you to effect your escape, and avoid the death, which has overtaken so many before your eyes?

Supposing, however, that you were unable to endure the severities of repentance, and that you were obliged to desist: still you would have the satisfaction to reflect, that you had spent some time in innocence; that you had made some efforts to appease an angry God; that you had avoided some sins; and that the treasure of divine wrath, which is laid up against you, is not quite so great as it otherwise would have been. You would have acquired a right to represent your weakness to your Lord: "Lord! thou seest my weakness," you would have a right to say, "thou art witness to the desires of my heart. Why am I not more resolute in thy service, more hardened against the allurements of the world, and more watchful over myself! Put a final conclusion, O Lord, to my inconstancy: deprive the world of the dominion, which it still

holds over my heart: take possession of thy ancient rights, and draw me not to thee by halves, lest I forsake thee again.—I have so often sworn to thee eternal love; I have so often prostrated myself at thy feet; and, with my eyes bathed in tears, confessed my iniquities, and have again returned to my former ways, that I can no longer confide in my own strength. With a heart so fickle, and inconstant, what can I expect? Be moved, O Lord, at the sight of my danger and distress: my weakness discourages, and alarms me: I know that inconstancy in thy ways is a presage of perdition. But, my God! whilst I am yet susceptible of the impressions of thy grace, I will endeavour to return to thee: and, if I must lose my soul, I will rather perish in the attempt to be virtuous, than seek an imaginary, a terrible tranquillity in a fixed, and declared revolt

against thee, and thus renounce the hope of those eternal goods, which thou hast prepared for thy faithful servants."

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

ON THE DISPOSITIONS REQUIRED FOR A WORTHY COMMUNION.

Prepare the way of the Lord, make strait his paths. . . . . Luke iii. 4.

THESE words the Church incessantly repeats during the time of Advent, in order to infuse into our souls a perfect knowledge of the dispositions which are required for worthily celebrating the approaching solemnity of Christmas. *Prepare,* she says, *the ways of the Lord; make his paths strait. Let the vallies be filled up, and the mountains and hills be levelled: let the crooked roads be made*

strait, and the rough smooth. Or, in other words, prepare yourselves, my dear children, to reap the abundant fruits of this mystery by humiliation of heart, by meekness and charity, by uprightness and uniformity of life, by renouncing your own vain wisdom and exalted ideas, and by the spirit of self-denial and penance.

In the name of the Church, therefore, I address the same words to those of my present auditory, who piously intend at this time to purify their souls by the sacrament of penance, and to prepare a place for the spiritual birth of Jesus in their hearts by a worthy communion.—*Prepare the way of the Lord:* the sacrament, which you propose to receive, is the most solemn rite of our religion, and the source of the greatest graces.—Take every precaution, adopt every means which can contribute to prepare your souls for a worthy communication with the Deity:

for there is this dreadful alternative; if your hearts be not worthily disposed, this heavenly bread, instead of nourishing your souls, and fitting you for eternal life, will draw down on your heads the heaviest judgments, even eternal damnation.—Perhaps you may say: "If there be this alternative, it would be more adviseable to abstain from this divine food." By no means: in this bread alone will you find the true nourishment of your souls: it is the strength of the strong, and the support of the weak; the consolation of the afflicted, and the pledge of eternal happiness. To communicate seldom, is the surest way to communicate unworthily.—I repeat therefore again: *Prepare ye the way of the Lord.*

The importance of the subject is worthy your most serious attention. On the one side, you are to avoid the most grievous of all crimes—the profanation of the body and blood of the

Son of God: and on the other, you are to qualify yourselves in a proper manner for reaping the immense fruits of a worthy communion.—The dispositions which are indispensably requisite for this important work, I will reduce to three, namely, a lively faith, a pure conscience, and an ardent love: these I will discuss as briefly as the subject will permit.

1. The first disposition required, is a *lively faith.* I speak not of that faith which distinguishes us from unbelievers, and which the mercy of God infused into our souls in our very infancy: but I speak of that faith, which pierces the clouds where the Most High resides:—I speak of that faith, which beholds him, not as through a perspective glass, but as if face to face:—I speak of that faith, which sees the angels covering their faces with their wings, and the pillars of heaven trembling in the presence of this great King;

—of that faith, which would not be increased by the testimony of the senses, and which is happy, not because it has not seen and has believed, but because here its belief has made him, as it were, present to the sight:—I speak of that humble faith, which approaches to the altar, like Moses to the burning bush, like the Israelites to Mount Sinaï;—of that faith, which feels the presence of the Deity, and which cries out with St. Peter: *Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a mortal man, and a sinner*, Luke v. 8. — I speak of that faith, which annihilates the soul in the presence of the God of Majesty, and fills her with dread, lest she should present herself at his table without due dispositions, without the wedding garment.

This is the faith, which the apostle requires in all who approach the holy table.—But, my God! can such a faith be found upon earth! If thou wert again to appear amongst us, thou

wouldst find thy chosen people, the Christians, as sensual, and as carnal, as thy once chosen people the Jews: thou wouldst be a stranger amongst us. —Ah! my beloved, when he shall be seen coming in the clouds of heaven, men shall wither away through fear; the sinner shall hide his face, and call out to the mountains to fall upon him, and cover him:—and is not the same God seated on our altars?—Do not the celestial spirits descend from heaven, and minister to the priest when he offers up the tremendous mysteries? Yes: from this mysterious tribunal, the great God of heaven examines the heart of every individual that bends his knee before him: he separates the elect from the reprobate; he passes the sentence of death and of life; he holds the thunders of his vengeance in one hand, and crowns of glory in the other.

Formerly, no one could see God and live. The unhappy Bethshamites were

exterminated merely for looking into the ark:—Heliodorus was chastised visibly by angels from heaven, because he presumed to enter the sanctuary:—the Israelites were not permitted to approach the mount, when God gave the commandments.——But now, because the fire of his wrath does not burst forth from our altars, and destroy the wretch who presumes unworthily to approach him, we receive him into our breasts without fear, without respect! Half an hour employed in reciting a set form of prayers, is our only preparation:—we receive him—we recite a few more prayers, in the same tepid manner as the first—and depart, perhaps never more to thank him for this unutterable favour.—Ah! if we beheld the body of the Lord in its glorified state present before us; if the testimony of faith made the same impression on our mind as the testimony of the senses, with what

sentiments should we present ourselves at the sacred table! How constantly, how profoundly would our thoughts be employed even for a month beforehand! and when the time itself drew near, with what ardour should we devote the preceding days to retirement, to silence, to prayer, and mortification! Yes: my beloved, every instant would increase our solicitude, our fears, and our joy. With difficulty should we be able to divest ourselves sufficiently of that awful respect, with which the presence of incomprehensible Majesty inspired us, and to assume sufficient confidence to open our hearts to so great a guest. Whether we were engaged in our accustomed occupations, in company, or in amusements, we should be unable to divert our thoughts from this subject: Jesus, and his infinite love and condescension, would engross our whole attention.—

The Christian who is affected in this manner, truly discerns the body of the Lord.

The worldly man, I acknowledge, is troubled and confused on the approach of a solemnity, when either custom, example, or the laws of the Church, require that he should present himself at the table of the Lord.—But, my God! whence originate these sentiments? From a heart overflowing with love and fear? From a heart which is convinced of its unworthiness, and which, prostrate in spirit at the feet of Christ, implores the pardon of its multiplied transgressions?—No, my beloved: they are engendered by a heart which delights not in the things of God; which loathes the delicacies of the banquet of the Lord: which, like the blind and the dumb in the gospel, is dragged by the laws of the Church from the lanes and hedges, and high-

ways of perdition, and placed against its will at the marriage table.

The true Christian, on the contrary, has a greater relish for this heavenly bread, than for all the luxuries of the world. This divine food is the only comfort in his banishment, the remedy for all his evils, the alleviation of all his afflictions, the desirable object of his wishes and tears. He is more attentive, more cautious, more solicitous in his preparations to receive it, than about any other action in life.

Now, my brethren, examine yourselves, and certify with candour and impartiality, whether or not you are animated with this lively faith of the true Christian. We will then proceed to the second part of the preparation, which consists in a purified conscience, and to which St. Paul alludes in these words: *Let a man prove himself before he eat of this bread,* 1 Cor. xi.

2. But in what does this probation consist? Is it merely in the confession of sins, and in the transitory sentiments of contrition, with which the generality of Christians are animated on these occasions? Far from it.—You must reflect, that you are hastening to receive the body of Jesus Christ, the bread of angels, the Lamb without spot, who will endure those only in his sight, who have either preserved their innocence undefiled, or have regained it by repentance. You must reflect, that it is the Christian Passover of which you propose to partake, and that the participation is lawful only to those who are the disciples of Jesus indeed; who renounce their own will, who carry their cross, and who walk in the footsteps of their crucified Saviour. You must reflect, that you are about to receive a God of such infinite purity, that the angels are not clean in his sight, and consequently, that you

must banish from your heart every defilement, every stain that is offensive to the eyes of his sanctity.—This, my beloved, is your probation. Examine yourselves, therefore; look into the state of your souls; scrutinize your affections; reason with yourselves in this manner: "I am invited to partake of the sacred body and blood of my Jesus, and to partake in such a manner as to be changed into him. But when this great Searcher of hearts shall enter into my breast, will he discover nothing that is unworthy of the sanctity of his presence? Will he find the source of my passions and vices dried up, or will he find that the torrent is pent up only for a time? Will he say to my soul, as he said to Zacheus: *This day salvation is come to this house?* Luke xix. 9.—Have I entirely subdued that passion which has so long exercised its tyranny over me?—that spirit of resentment, of which I acknowledged

myself guilty, and repentant at the feet of God's minister?—that love of riches, which has so often led me into acts of injustice?—that unequal and capricious temper, which is impassioned by the slightest contradiction?—that vanity, which despises the lowly state in which my forefathers lived?—that envy, which was always jealous of the reputation and prosperity of my equals?—that censorious and malignant disposition, which is always ready to condemn the actions of others, and to applaud my own?—that spirit of sensuality, of pleasure, and of immortification, which reigns in my whole frame?—Has the confession of my crimes entirely eradicated them from my heart? Am I a new man? What am I, O God? Am I dead, or am I alive in thy sight? Enlighten my eyes, I beseech thee, and suffer not thy Christ, thy Holy One to see corruption."——In this manner, my beloved

friends, ought we to prove ourselves. God forbad the Jews to offer honey and leaven in sacrifice: see that you bring not to the altar the leaven of sin and the honey of pleasure; I mean, that love of pleasure and the world, that soft and effeminate disposition, which is an enemy to the cross, and irreconcileable with salvation.

3. In the third place, when we communicate, we must endeavour to be animated with the same sentiments with which our Lord was animated when he instituted this sacrament—*I have ardently longed*, said he to his apostles, *to eat this pasch with you*, Luke xxii. 15. He sighed for the happy moment: the thought of it soothed the agonizing pains which were occasioned by the foresight of his approaching passion.—Here then is our model. We must seat ourselves at this heavenly table with a heart burning with the seraphic flames of love, with a heart panting after the

waters of life, with a heart tormented with a holy hunger and thirst for the body and blood of her Redeemer. "Lord, come and take full possession of my soul," the pious Christian exclaims with St. Augustine, *Conf.* b. 1. c. 5. "come, O Lord, and be my only delight; satisfy my eager desires, inebriate me with the torrent of thy pleasures: take off my affections from all creatures, from the whole world itself, and unite me to thee for ever.—If thou shouldst discover in my soul any remains of my former corruption, cleanse me with thy grace; command *that I be made whole,* John v. 6. Come, O Lord, and delay not: every good thing will come together with thee: sufferings, persecutions, afflictions, and humiliations, will appear as nothing, when I shall have tasted thy ineffable sweetness."—These, my beloved, are the sentiments which ought to accompany us to the altar.

But, alas! what are the sentiments of the generality of Christians? Some have a loathing, a disgust for this divine food; to partake of it at the times of indulgence, is thought too often: some would not communicate even once a year, were they not driven to the altar by the anathemas and excommunications of the Church.—My God! is it possible that this precept of love, which constitutes the whole happiness of a Christian on earth, should be considered even by a single individual as a painful duty! Is it possible that the most glorious privilege, with which man can be favoured, should be a subject of constraint and disquietude! Didst thou expect such treatment, O divine Jesus! when, out of compassion to lost man, thou didst bequeath thyself to him in this adorable sacrament?—Others approach the altar with a sluggish heart, a depraved taste, a frozen soul. These people frequent

the sacraments, and indulge in worldly pleasures alternately: they partake as freely of the table of Satan, as of the table of Jesus: they attempt to serve two masters. A communion costs them only one day of restraint and reserve; their devotion ends with the solemnity: they are content with what they have done, and they return, as if by a preconcerted agreement with self-love, to their former ways. Thus they come to the banquet with a palate vitiated by the pleasures and follies of the world: they taste not the sweets of this heavenly food: the tumult of their passions, the recollection of their unlawful pastimes, make a greater impression on their minds, than the presence of Jesus. Against these the Royal Prophet denounces a curse: *May their table be to them a snare, a stumbling-block, and a scandal,* Ps. lxviii. 23.

To communicate in commemoration of Jesus, my beloved brethren, we must

awaken in our souls all the tender emotions, which are naturally excited in the mind of a lover when communing with the object of his dearest affections. The most tender connections are weakened, the warmest friendship is cooled by absence. Jesus foresaw that, after his ascension, his disciples would soon forget his favours and instructions. Moses was only forty days on the mount, and yet, in that short interval of time, the Israelites forgot the prodigies which he had wrought in their favour: *Let us make gods,* they said, *who may go before us, and defend us from our enemies,* Exod. xxxii. 1.—In consideration of this our natural inconstancy, the paternal goodness of our divine Redeemer would not leave us in an orphan and defenceless state: his infinite love would not expose us to the danger of forgetting him, and therefore he descends daily on our altars; he resides constantly in our tabernacle.—From

hence the voice of the turtle dove is heard, calling to her beloved, (*Cant.* ii. 12.): here we may enjoy his presence, and dwell with increasing raptures on his wonders, his blessings, and his love.

Our pious ancestors, with a truly religious spirit, visited the land which he had sanctified by his presence. The sentiments which were inspired by the sight of the places where he wrought his principal miracles, and shed his precious blood for our salvation, gave confidence to repenting sinners, endowed the weak with strength, and inflamed the just with increased ardour.

It is not necessary, however, to cross the seas. Salvation is near at hand. The word which we preach will, if you please, rest on your lips and in your heart. — Open the eyes of faith—fix them on the altar, and you will see, not a country which he formerly sanctified by his presence, but Jesus Christ himself.—Approach, then, in commemora-

tion of him: draw near to this unquenchable fire of love: rekindle in your breasts the seraphic flames of affection and gratitude.——Learn from his meekness, which would not suffer him *to break the bruised reed, or extinguish the smoaking flax,* (Isa. xlii. 3. Matt. xii. 20.) that is, to revenge the injuries he received from the weakest, the most defenceless of mankind; learn, I say, to correct the sallies of an impatient and hasty temper.—From his laborious and painful life, learn to renounce a life of softness and ease.—From his modesty and humility, learn to correct the odious passions of pride and vain-glory.—From his zeal against the profaners of his temple, learn to present yourselves before him with respect and fear.—From his fast of forty days, learn to exercise yourselves in the holy virtues of mortification and penance.—From his love and charity for lost man, learn to pity the distresses of the afflicted,

and to relieve their wants.—From his pious and instructive conversation with his disciples, learn to converse with your neighbour in the language of piety and instruction. — In a word, from his innocence and example, learn to correct every imperfection, every weakness to which you have hitherto been subject. In this manner, you will communicate in commemoration of Jesus.

But if you approach the altar with a heart constantly defiled with the same imperfections — imperfections, a hundred times repented of, and never sincerely renounced; if you do not endeavour to advance daily more and more in the ways of perfection, but propose to yourselves a certain degree of sanctity, beyond which you never intend to pass; if you relapse as often as you pretend to repent, and, after many years, are not more devout than you were at first; if you continue addicted to animosi-

ties, dislikes, calumny, detraction, vanity, and pride; and if you are as unmortified, and as much the enemy of the cross of Christ as before, oh! you have more than sufficient reason to tremble.

Perhaps you may ask: "Does the Christian, who is defiled with these habitual imperfections, receive the body of the Lord unworthily?" This question can be solved only by the great Searcher of hearts. The following is the only answer that man can give: namely, that such a one does not communicate in commemoration of Jesus—that, at the last day, many things which appear right and just to man, will be discovered to have been abominations in the eyes of God — that many, who had even prophesied in his name, will be rejected with, *I know you not*—and that the state of such a communicant is exposed to the greatest danger.—Peter, although the voice

of Truth had declared him undefiled, was not permitted to partake of the last supper, until Jesus had washed his feet. — Magdalen, although she had washed away her sins, and bathed the feet of her Saviour with floods of tears, was forbidden to touch him after his resurrection, because her eagerness was not divested of every imperfection.— And we, defiled and imperfect as we are,—strangers to true penance,—intent only on enjoyment and ease,—tepid, and callous to the tender feelings of divine love—we, who neither endeavour nor desire to advance in piety beyond a certain point—we *frequently* partake of his sacred body !——O ! what an abyss, my friends,—perhaps, what a multitude of crimes is concealed from our view, of which we repent not, because we are ignorant of their existence; and which, perhaps, are the stock on which we engraft innumerable profanations ! — What an abyss ! I say

again — what a mystery of iniquity will, perhaps, be revealed on the day of final retribution! —— What am I in thy sight, O God! I can neither please thee nor displease thee by halves;—my state will not allow me to steer a middle course between virtue and vice :—if I am not a saint, I am a sacrilegious profaner :—if I am not a vessel of honour, I am a vessel of dishonour :—if I am not an angel of light —(there is no medium)—I am an angel of darkness :—if I am not the living temple of the Holy Ghost, I am a den of unclean spirits.—Good God! what powerful motives are here for vigilance, circumspection, fear, and love, when we receive the holy communion.

Ah! the fruits produced by one worthy communion are so abundant, so manifest, the soul is overwhelmed with such a torrent of heavenly graces and communications, that, had I no other reason to suspect the unworthiness of

my communions, than the little profit I reap from them, I should have sufficient reason to tremble. The Christian, who partakes worthily of this sacred food, feels his pious hunger increased;—and I retire from the holy table fatigued, and satiated; I rejoice that the business is concluded, as if it were a painful, an unwelcome task. —The Christian, who partakes worthily of this sacred food, lives only for God;—and I continue to live for the world, for myself, for my friends, for my family; seldom do I live a single day for God alone. —— What then must I do? Ought I to refrain from this sacred food?—What! shall the fruit of the tree of life be forbidden me? What! shall the bread of consolation be no more broken for me? ——No: my God! thou wilt not banish me from thy table. Thou willest only that I put on the wedding garment: thou dost not refuse me the

bread of thy children, but thou willest that I should not, by my unworthiness, oblige thee to give me a serpent in its place.——Come, then, dear Jesus, and prepare a place in my heart worthy of thy presence: humble my pride; correct my failings; purify my desires. Thou alone canst be the precursor to prepare thy ways. Fill the immense void in my soul with the gifts of thy Holy Spirit; enable me to partake worthily of thy sacred body at the approaching solemnity; and to live solely, and eternally for thee, O Jesus, my Mediator, my Lord, my God, and my All; to whom be honour, and power, and praise, and glory, and benediction for ever and ever. Amen.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

ON THE BENEFITS CONFERRED ON MAN BY THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people; for this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. . . Luke ii. 10, 11.

THESE are the great tidings which had raised the expectations of the world during the long period of four thousand years: this is the great event, which so many prophets had foretold, so many ceremonies had prefigured, so many just men had looked for, and which all nature seemed to promise, and to hasten, by the universal corruption of all

flesh: this is the great blessing, which the goodness of God had prepared for man, from the time that the infidelity of his first parents had subjected him to sin, and death.

The Saviour, the Christ the Lord at length appears on the earth. The clouds rain down the Just One: the Star of Jacob is manifested to the universe: the sceptre is taken from Juda; and he, who was to come, is arrived: the Lord exhibits to his chosen people the promised sign: a virgin conceives, and brings forth a son; and from Bethlehem the leader comes forth, who is to instruct and govern his people Israel.

What an accumulation of blessings does this birth announce to the children of men! It would not have been so pompously announced, so ardently expected, and desired during so many ages; it would not have been the great object of all the great dispensa-

tions of God to man, had it not been the most signal testimony of love which the Almighty could give to his creatures.—What a happy night! The heavens resound with canticles of thanksgiving and praise.

In order that we may be entitled to participate in the transports of joy, which this wonderful mystery dispenses in heaven, and on earth, it is necessary that we be disposed to partake of the blessings, which it has purchased for us.—The only cause of this universal gladness, is the means of salvation, which this mystery has procured for all mankind. If, therefore, instead of embracing these means, we are obstinately resolved on perishing, the church weeps over us; and we mingle sorrow, and grief with the joy, which these happy tidings occasion.

But, what are the inestimable blessings, which the birth of the Son of God has purchased for man? They are

proclaimed by the angel to the shepherds: *Glory to God on high; and peace to men of good will.* The glory, which ignorant, and infatuated man had attempted to usurp, is secured to God; and the peace, to which man had been hitherto a stranger, is imparted to him. The first shall form the substance of the present discourse; and the second shall be reserved for a future discussion.

1. Man was placed on earth for the sole purpose of giving to the Author of his existence the glory, and homage, which exclusively belonged to him.—Every created object reminded him of this duty.—To the sovereign majesty of his God he owed the tribute of homage, and adoration:—to his paternal goodness, the tribute of love;—to his infinite wisdom, the sacrifice of his reason, and understanding. These duties were engraven in his heart, and implanted in his very nature; they were

incessantly announced to him by every creature; man could not listen to the dictates of his own heart, or to the silent voice of the inanimate creation, without hearing them enforced.—Nevertheless he forgot them: he turned a deaf ear to every admonition, and entirely effaced them from his mind. The idolater gave to creatures that glory which was due to the Creator alone:—the Jew honoured him with his lips, and confined his testimonies of love and gratitude to an exterior homage, which was unworthy of his infinite majesty:—while the philosopher, bewildered, and lost in the intricacies of his own researches, measured the understanding of God by that of man, and vainly thought that reason, which was a stranger even to its *own* nature, could fathom the deepest truths. With these three evils was the whole world infected. God was either not known, or not glorified; and man forgot his

own weakness, and corruption, by listening to the suggestions of ignorant pride.

To what excess did idolatry extend its profane worship! The death of an universally admired character was the signal for his introduction to the rank of a divinity, and his vile remains, on which his inanity was stampt in the most indelible character, became the title of his imaginary glory, and immortality. Conjugal love had its peculiar duties; impure love imitated its example, and erected altars to its own shameful abominations. The adulterer, and the fornicator had their temples, their priests, and their sacrifices.—The general folly, or rather, the general corruption adopted this confused, and detestable worship: the whole world was infected with it: the laws of empires authorized it: the splendor of the sacrifices, the magnificence of the temples, and the immense riches of

the idols, gave an awful respectability to its extravagance.—Every nation was jealous of having gods of its own: and when no individual of the human species could be found, who had so far distinguished himself as to be judged worthy of the god-head, they prostituted their adoration to the brute creation. Impure homage became the worship of these impure divinities: cities, mountains, fields, and deserts were defiled by the superb edifices erected to the gods of pride, impurity, and revenge. The multitude of divinities was equal to that of the passions: gods were almost as numerous as men: every thing was a god on earth, except the God who made it. He alone was unheard of by the greater number of his creatures. He alone was either rejected, forgotten, or unknown.

In this manner was the world, almost from the beginning, plunged in the horrors of darkness, and ignorance:

every age added new impieties. The nearer the time approached, which was decreed for the coming of the Messiah, the more did the corruption of man increase: Rome herself, the mistress of the world, adopted every mode of worship peculiar to the different nations who submitted to her yoke; and erected within her walls temples to the idols of every conquered people;—temples, which might be more properly denominated the public monuments of her folly, than of her victories.

But the general corruption of all flesh could not induce the Almighty to shower down the fire of his wrath on the guilty, as formerly on Sodom and Gomorrah, nor to exterminate the whole race by another deluge:—no; his mercy had decreed to effect their salvation. He placed in the heavens the sign of his alliance with mankind; and this true sign was not the luminous rainbow which appears in the clouds,

but Jesus Christ his only Son, the Word made flesh, the true seal of an eternal alliance, and the only light which enlighteneth the world.

On this day he appeared on the earth, and restored to his Father the glory, which an impious idolatry had endeavoured to wrest from him. The homage, which his pure and immaculate soul, united to the Word Incarnate, paid to the majesty of God, made abundant amends in an instant for all the honour which an ungrateful world had withheld from him, and prostituted on creatures. An Adorer—God-man, gave more glory to the Divinity, than all ages, and all idolatrous nations had taken from him.—Agreeable must this homage of an Incarnate God have been in the eyes of the Great Sovereign of the universe; since it alone erased idolatry from the earth, overturned its profane altars, crumbled to dust the vain idols, imposed silence

on the oracles of devils, and changed their superb temples, which had hitherto been the asylums of every abomination, into houses of adoration, and prayer.—Thus was *the face of the earth renewed:* (*Ps.* ciii. 30.) the only true God, who had hitherto been unknown in the midst of cities the most renowned for learning, and civilization, began to be adored: the world acknowledged its Maker: God entered into the possession of his rights: a worship worthy of him was established over the earth: and adorers were selected in every place, who began to adore him in spirit and truth.

This was the first benefit arising from the birth of Christ.—But, my beloved brethren, are we partakers of this benefit? We do not indeed adore idols: we abhor an incestuous Jupiter, an impure Venus, a dissolute Apollo, a cruel and vindictive Mars. But is the true God more glorified, in the whole, by us, than he was by the pa-

gans? Do we not substitute in his place, and adore riches, sensuality, the world and its pleasures? For every thing, that we love more than God, we adore: every thing that we prefer before our Creator, we make the God of our heart: every thing, that exercises supreme dominion over our thoughts and actions, our desires and affections, our hopes and fears, is in reality the object of our worship; and in this sense, may it not be said with truth, that our passions are our gods, and that to them we sacrifice the true God?

How many idols of this description are there in the Christian world!—Impure love has its votaries: at its shrine are sacrificed riches, repose, peace of mind, and health both of body and soul. Wealth is a divinity, which engrosses the thoughts, the cares, the actions, the soul, the mind, the will of thousands: its altars are incessantly

surrounded, and no sacrifice is refused which it exacts as the price of its favours.—Shameful intemperance, likewise, which vilifies the name, and character of man, which is the bane of morality, which stupifies and drowns the brightest talents in the excesses of liquor and debauchery, and leaves a relish and inclination for nothing but the grossest pleasures of the sensual appetite; this shameful intemperance, I say, is another idol; and its senseless votaries proclaim, that life would not be worth enjoying, unless a considerable portion of it were consecrated to its worship.——The passions of men created the impure gods of heathenism: and Jesus destroyed those idols, by subduing the passions which created them. You seat them again on their usurped throne, when you indulge the same passions which made the whole world idolaters.—Of what avail is it, therefore, to know that there is only

one God, if you prostitute your homage to other objects? True worship proceeds from the heart; and if you devote not your heart to the service of God, you substitute, like the pagans, vile creatures in his place, and you give him not the glory which belongs to him.

The object, therefore, of the birth of Jesus was, not merely to manifest the name of his Father to mankind, and to establish on the ruins of idolatry the knowledge of the true God, but to form a congregation of adorers, who would place neither merit, nor reliance in exterior worship, when divested of the interior spirit of purity and love; and who would consider mercy, justice, and sanctity, as the most acceptable offerings to the Divinity, and the most pompous ornaments of his worship.—This is the second important benefit arising from the birth of Christ.

2. God was known in Judea, says the prophet. Judea erected no idol in her public places; nor paid to any other the homage which was due to the God of her father Abraham, *Num.* xxiii. 21. This was the only portion of the earth preserved from the general contagion. But the magnificence of her temple, the splendor of her sacrifices, the pomp of her solemnities, the exactitude of her legal observances had alone engrossed the attention of her children. She entered not into the spirit of interior worship, but confined her whole religion to the strict performance of these exterior duties. The morals of her inhabitants were not less corrupt than were those of the Gentiles: injustice, fraud, deceit, adultery, and every vice was prevalent, and even promoted by their attention to exterior observances alone. God was honoured with the lips, but the hearts of this ungrateful people were far from him.

Jesus came to undeceive Judea of an error so gross, so ancient, and so injurious to his Father. He came to teach his people that, however satisfied man may be with the performance of mere exterior worship, God considers the heart alone; that every species of homage in which the heart has no share, is rather an insult, and a mockery, than true worship; that it is useless to purify the outside, if the inside continue defiled with corruption; and that the only adoration which is acceptable to him, is adoration in spirit and truth.

But, alas! my brethren, is not this gross error—this error which was so often the subject of our Saviour's reproaches against the synagogue, is it not, I say, the error of the greater number of Christians of the present time? In what does the chief part of our religion consist? It consists, I am afraid, in certain exterior observances

alone, in fulfilling certain *public* duties prescribed by the laws of God and of the Church: and, what is more, I fear that the piety even of the more regular members of the christian body extends no further. They assist at the holy mysteries regularly; they scruple to transgress the laws of the Church: they recite certain prayers to which they are habituated; they celebrate the solemn festivals by the frequentation of the sacraments; and this is all. They are not more detached than other men from the world, and its criminal pleasures; they are not less attentive to the vanities of dress, or to the acquisition of wealth; they are not more disposed to break off a criminal engagement, or to avoid the occasions which have always proved fatal to their innocence: they perform not even these exterior duties of religion either with a pure heart, a lively faith, or an unfeigned charity; all their passions

maintain their influence notwithstanding these religious exercises, which they are prompted to observe, probably, more out of respect to decency and custom, than from a sense of the duty which they owe to God.—I will allow, indeed, that they are actuated by a kind of fear: for, if they lived, like the impious, without attendance on any public duties of religion, without any exterior profession of worship, they would consider themselves as accursed in the sight of God, and worthy of the sudden, and most dreadful judgments of heaven.—But how inconsistent is the heart of man! These very duties they do not scruple to violate, and render nugatory by their criminal excesses; and without remorse, without dread, or rather with the most presumptuous confidence, they dare to frustrate the effect of these superficial remnants of religion by a conduct which religion condemns, and abhors:

they continue on in the commission of crimes which will inevitably draw down the wrath of God, and they appear not to be conscious of their danger: they are satisfied in mind with what they do, and imagine that they give to God what belongs to him, whereas their only religion is, and has been all along, mere external homage: a homage which is entirely useless; a homage which He looks down upon with abhorrence, and indignation.

Nevertheless, these, as I have already said, are the most upright, the most regular, in the eyes of men, of all who are designated under the class of worldings. They have not shaken off the yoke, like so many others; they blaspheme not what they do not understand: they laugh not at the sacred mysteries of religion; they consider not the service of God, as beneath their attention; but notwithstanding all this may be said of them,

their attachment to religion is not centered in the heart, it possesses no influence over their conduct; they dishonour the service of God by their crimes: they are Christians only in name.——Thus, exterior pomp of worship exists amongst us, with a depravation of morals more deeply rooted, and more universal, than the prophets even imputed to the obduracy and hypocrisy of the Jews. Thus the religion, in which we glory, is no more than a superficial mode of worship in respect to the greater number of the faithful. Thus the new covenant, the law of spirit and life, which ought to be written on our hearts, and which ought to form adorers in spirit and truth, produces mere phantoms, false adorers, worshippers only in appearance, a people like the Jews, who honour him with their lips, but whose corrupted hearts, defiled with numberless crimes, and bound down to the earth

by the chains of lawless passions, are always far removed from him.

In this second benefit, therefore, of the birth of Jesus, the greater number of Christians have no share. Jesus abolished the worship of the Jews because it was purely exterior, and confined to the sacrifices of beasts, and to legal observances. In the place of these empty shadows he substituted a law which the heart alone can fulfil: he substituted a system of worship, of which the love of his Father is the first and principal act of homage. But this sacred worship, this new commandment of love, this holy deposit which he has bequeathed to us, has degenerated in our hands: we have debased it into a pharisaical worship, in which the heart has no share, which restrains not our irregular inclinations, which has no influence over our morals, and which makes us so much the more criminal, as we abuse the gift which

was intended to eradicate our vices and purify our souls.

3. In the third place, the ignorance and corruption of mankind had deprived the Almighty of the glory which was due to his Providence, and eternal wisdom. The philosophers of old, who were necessitated by the voice of reason to acknowledge the existence of one only Supreme Being, represented him either as a Deity wrapped up within himself, and too great to condescend to pay attention to the things of this earth, or as a God without liberty; who, although he was the Lord over mankind, was governed by the decrees of what they called *Fate*, and on account of this subjection, could not prevent any action of man, or any occurrence in the world; all which they supposed were predestinated so to be, and must happen of necessity.—Jesus came to restore to his Father the glory which had been wrested from him by

this pernicious error: he came to teach mankind that faith is the source of true wisdom, and that the sacrifice of reason is the first step to christian philosophy: he came to remove every doubt respecting the nature of the Deity, and to teach us what was proper to be known concerning him, and what to remain unknown.

But, alas! where are the believers who make the entire sacrifice of their reason to faith, and bow down their heads in silent respect, and adoration, before the majestic veil of religion?—I speak not of the impious who say, *There is no God:* but I speak of the greater number of the faithful, whose ideas of the Divinity are as false and human, as those formerly entertained by the pagan philosophers. This numerous class of adorers of the true God, consider not the occurrences of life as ordained, or permitted by his providence: they live as if either

chance, or the caprice of men were the causes of what happens on the earth; they seem to think that *prosperity* and *adversity* are the two divinities which govern, and preside over every thing that passes in the world. This is certainly the fact: for, if they looked up to God as the great disposer of all human events, would they murmur and complain, would they indulge impatience and despondency, would they entertain the spirit of envy and revenge, when any thing happens contrary to their inclinations, or interest? —I speak, likewise, of those men who imagine, that the mysterious ways of God, in promoting our eternal welfare, ought to be laid open to the understanding; and finding that the powers of reason are too weak to fathom the secrets of his grace in operating the salvation of his elect, will not exclaim with the apostle: *O the depth of the wisdom, and knowledge of God,* (Rom.

xi. 33.) but are tempted to believe that, either God does not concern himself about our salvation, or that it is to no purpose that we be concerned about it ourselves.—I speak of those men, who delight in the giddy circles of dissipation, who discover something plausible, and convincing in the weakest, and most senseless arguments which incredulity opposes to faith; who seem to wish that religion were false, and who are less affected by the weight of proofs, by which the swellings of our reason are repressed, and truth and immortality brought to light, than by a declamatory harangue, which proves nothing except the boldness of impiety and blasphemy.——Finally, I speak of many Christians who tacitly avow that the belief of the wonderful prodigies, which religion has recorded, is calculated only for the ignorant and the simple; and who seem to think that the subversion of the order of nature,

by the miraculous interposition of providence, is a work too great for the Almighty to effect, except on the most extraordinary occasions; and who refuse to acknowledge a continuation of miracles in a church which was founded on them, which glories in them as the peculiar and distinctive mark of her divine origin, and which is herself the greatest miracle.

These unhappy men wrest from God the glory which the birth of Jesus had ensured to him. He taught us to captivate our reason to the belief of the incomprehensible mystery of his manifestation in our flesh. He terminated the wanderings of the human mind, and withdrew it from the abyss of error, into which it had fallen under the guidance of human reason, and brought it to the paths of truth and life.—We, nevertheless, refuse to submit to his authority, and even under the empire of faith, we desire to follow

as formerly the standard of weak reason. Those mysteries of religion which are above our comprehension, stagger our belief: we wish to reform every thing: we have doubts about every thing: we imagine that God thinks like man. Without entirely renouncing our faith, we destroy its influence. Hence our morality is vitiated, our vices are multiplied: the love of present things is enkindled in our hearts; the love of the good things to come is utterly lost and extinguished. Hatred, and dissensions are diffused every where among the faithful, and the primitive traits of innocence, holiness, and charity, which in the first ages made religion appear amiable in the eyes even of those who refused to embrace it, are in danger of being effaced for ever from the minds of the greatest part of men.—Let not this be said of all.

Let us, my beloved brethren, enter

into the spirit of this solemnity. May Jesus be born again in our souls: may he take possession of his rights over us.—We shall then, in union with his faithful followers, give to God the glory which in justice belongs to him; and he, in return, will admit us into a partnership of his glory in the kingdom of heaven.

SUNDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS.

ON THE BENEFITS CONFERRED ON MAN BY THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all the people: for this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. . . . . Luke ii. 10, 11.

AGAIN, my beloved friends, your attention is summoned to the joyful tidings announced by the angels. A Saviour is born to us, who is Christ the Lord. His empire shall be extended, and there shall be no end of peace, *Isa.* ix. 7. By the completion of this wonderful mystery, *the seed of the woman has crushed the serpent's head,* (Gen. iii. 15.); *the hand-*

writing, that was against us, is reversed, (Col. ii. 14.) : the jaws of hell are closed, and the gates of heaven are thrown open to all who are seriously disposed to enter. The times foretold by the prophet are, in a spiritual sense, arrived : *The wolf dwelleth with the lamb,* (Isa. xi. 6.) ;—the lawless passions of the mind are hushed, and the spirit of meekness resides undisturbed in the breast. *The calf, the lion, and the sheep live together, and a little child leadeth them,* (ibid.)——Pride, ambition, and the lust of power, the haughty tyrants of the soul, have resigned their place to the more humble virtues of mildness and simplicity.—Or, in another sense, *the lion,* the great and mighty ones of the earth,—mix confusedly with *the calf and sheep*—the ignorant and the simple, in the fold of Christ ; and a *little child*—the humility and simplicity of the gospel, is the indiscriminate guide of all. *The*

bear feeds with the calf, and their young ones lie down together; they do not hurt, neither do they kill in all my holy mountain, (Isa. xi. 7, 9.) :—hatred, animosity, and revenge are forgotten, and the spirit of brotherly love, and unlimited forgiveness of injuries, have dispelled the tumults of the breast, and diffused an universal peace. *The lion eats straw like the ox,* (ib. 7.) : — the love of sensual pleasures is renounced, and the evils which it entailed on mankind are no more. *The sucking child plays on the hole of the asp,* (ib. 8.) :—innocence of mind has dispelled the terrors and alarms which haunt the imagination of the guilty, and the securest confidence and peace direct all their steps.

These mystic times, my beloved, are arrived. An universal peace is announced to us.—But have we hitherto enjoyed this peace? It is, indeed, announced to all; but it is enjoyed only

by men of good will.—On this subject I will enlarge in the present discourse; hoping that the description of the benefits imparted by this happy peace will stimulate your endeavours to banish from your breasts the evils which have hitherto prevented your enjoyment of it.

1. An universal peace reigned over the universe when Jesus, *the Prince of Peace,* (Isa. ix. 6.) appeared on the earth. All the nations subjected to the Roman empire peaceably endured the yoke of those haughty conquerors of the world. Rome herself, after the numberless dissensions which had depopulated her streets, and inundated Asia and Europe with the blood of her citizens, rested from the horrors of war, and, reduced under the authority of a Cæsar, found in her servitude that peace, which she never enjoyed during the days of her boasted liberty.

The universe was thus in a state of

profound peace; but it was not the peace which was promised to men of good will. Notwithstanding the din of arms had ceased, mankind were addicted to the most violent and tormenting passions, and experienced within themselves wars and dissensions of the worst description. Ignorant of their God, victims of the tumults and divisions of their own breasts, assaulted by the multiplicity and the incessant contrariety of their disordered inclinations, they were strangers to true peace: and no wonder; for they sought after this peace in the very source that gave rise to all their troubles and disquietudes.

Our divine Redeemer descends on the earth with full power to impart to man that happy peace, which the world could not give. He comes to apply the proper remedy to the disorder. His divine philosophy is not confined to pompous precepts, which flatter the un-

derstanding without eradicating the evil; but as pride, self-love, hatred, and revenge, were the sources from whence proceeded the tumults of the heart of man, he comes to hush them into peace by his grace, his doctrine, and his example.

Yes, my beloved, pride was the primary source of the evils which were endured by the children of men.—What wars, what devastations had this detestable passion occasioned in the world! With what torrents of blood had it deluged the universe! What was the history of all ages and states? What was the history of peoples and nations, of princes and conquerors? What was it, but the history of the direful calamities which pride had poured forth on mankind? The whole world resembled a melancholy theatre, on which this restless and haughty passion daily exhibited the most shocking spectacles.—The external effects,

however, of this vice were only a faint resemblance of the agitations which proud man experienced in his soul. Ambition was exalted to the rank of virtues; and indifference about honours and supereminence was treated as meanness of soul. A single man spread terror and devastation over a whole kingdom, overturned its laws and customs, and buried thousands in the abyss of poverty and distress, with no other object in view, than the usurpation of the first place among the people. The success of his crimes excited admiration and respect: and his name, stained with the blood of his fellow creatures, shone in the annals of history with superior lustre. Thus was a fortunate and bloody warrior considered the greatest man of his age.——This passion in the hearts of the multitude was equally furious and restless, although attended with less brilliant effects. The obscure man was

not more tranquil than the man of dignity: each one contended for superiority above his equals: each one attempted to satisfy the desires of pride; and, as these were insatiable, each one divested himself of the possibility of enjoying either peace or tranquillity. Thus was pride the source of honour and human glory; and thus, likewise, was it the fatal destroyer of the repose and happiness of mankind.

The birth of Christ exposes the fallacy of this error, and restores to the world the means of attaining true peace.——He could have manifested himself to mankind decorated with all the splendor of wealth and power: he had a right to assume the pompous titles of Conqueror of Juda—of Legislator of his people—of Saviour of Israel: Jerusalem would have acknowledged him with those glorious distinctions. But Jerusalem had worldly glory only in view; whereas Jesus

came to teach her that such glory was vain; that worldly pomp and grandeur were of no consideration in the eyes of God, and, consequently, ought to be of no consideration in the eyes of men; and that the oracles of the prophets foretold the coming of a Saviour, who was to redeem and sanctify the world, not by riches, and honour, and power, but by humility, ignominy, and suffering.

He, therefore, was born in Bethlehem, in a state of poverty and abjection:—He, whose birth was celebrated by the canticles of all the heavenly choirs, was born without any external pomp:—He, who was superior to principalities and powers, was not decorated with any title that could distinguish him in the eyes of men:—He, whose name was above all names, and who alone had power to inscribe the names of his elect in the great book of life, permitted his own name to be enrolled

amongst the most obscure of the subjects of Cæsar:—to him, only shepherds—simple and ignorant shepherds, pay their homage, although every thing that is in heaven, in hell, or on earth, was dependant on him:—in a word, every thing that was calculated to confound human pride was exhibited at his humble birth. — Ah! my beloved, look at your Saviour: if titles, if rank, if prosperity and wealth, were calculated to make you happy here below, and give peace to your souls, Jesus would certainly have possessed them, and imparted the valuable gift to his favoured disciples. But he informs us, by his example, that peace can be obtained only by despising them: he teaches us, that happiness depends on repressing those desires, which had hitherto been the only objects of our solicitude: he points out to us blessings of a more durable and substantial quality;—blessings, which

alone are capable of tranquillizing our hearts, of satisfying our desires, of assuaging our pains;—blessings, which man cannot take from us, and which may be obtained by only loving and desiring them.

And yet, where is the man that enjoys this happy peace? Wars, tumults, and miseries, are as common now as at any former period. Empires and states, which adore the God of peace, are not more peaceable than the nations of idolatry!—Where will you find that peace among Christians which ought to be their inheritance? Will you find it in cities? No: pride reigns triumphant there; every one is actuated by pride; every one attempts to be greater than his forefathers; every one envies the good fortune of a neighbour who attains honour or wealth.—Will you find it within the precincts of domestic retreat? Here you will discover that every enjoyment is embittered by

solicitudes and cares: you will see the father incessantly busied and troubled, not so much about the christian education, as about the temporal advancement of his children: these disquietudes and anxieties will accompany him to the grave, he will bequeath them to his children as an inheritance, and they in the same manner will hereafter transmit them to their descendants. — Will you find it in the palaces of kings? Here, likewise, a boundless ambition corrodes every heart: here, under the specious appearances of festivity and joy, the most violent and destructive passions are matured: here, happiness seems to reside, but in reality, the victims which pride consigns to wretchedness and discontent, are more numerous than elsewhere. — Will you find it in the humble cottage? From hence, indeed, many of the more violent passions are removed, but peace is not admitted in

their place: petty animosities, disappointments, jealousies, the fear of coming to want, and numberless other evils, torment their souls: there is always some untoward accident, some disagreeable behaviour, or unkind treatment from a neighbour, that disturbs their peace: and even where no external evils exist, there is always something wanting to complete their comfort; they are not satisfied with exactly what they have, and consequently, they enjoy not that peace which our Saviour came to impart to men of good will.—O blessed peace of my Jesus! which surpasseth all understanding, and which art the only remedy for the innumerable evils occasioned by pride, when wilt thou come, and take full possession of our hearts?

2. To the calamities I have already described, were added others arising from a different, though not less malignant source; I mean, from the im-

pure desires of the flesh.—Man had forgotten the excellence of his nature, and the sanctity of his origin, and had given himself up, like the beasts, to the impetuosity of that animal instinct. He concluded that, as this was the most violent and the most universal passion of the human breast, it was on that account the most innocent and lawful. To give a still greater sanction to these lustful excesses, he made them a part of his religion, and formed to himself impure gods, in whose temples this impious vice became a part of their religious worship. Even a philosopher, who in other respects stands in the first rank amongst the pagan sages, fearing that marriage would put a restraint on that abominable passion, proposed the abolition of that sacred union, in order to introduce a promiscuous intercourse between the sexes, as it is with beasts, and to continue the succession of the human race by crimi-

nal means alone. In proportion as this habit of dissoluteness was the prevailing distemper of the times, the appearance of its depravity seemed to be lost in the general corruption. But, my beloved friends, what a deluge of evils has it spread over the world! With what fury have we seen nations fighting against nations, kings against kings, brothers against brothers, spreading carnage and devastation on every side! These, in all probability, were for the most part judgments of God, which the multiplied commission of this vice drew down on the heads of the guilty.——In the individual this vice became an inexhaustible source of troubles and remorse. It flattered the soul with the assurance of pleasure, and of calm, undisturbed enjoyment; but jealousy, suspicion, rage, excess, satiety, inconstancy, and melancholy, attended its footsteps.—So apparent, indeed, were these effects, that, although laws,

religion, and universal example authorized it, the love alone of internal peace inspired a few prudent men, even in the ages of darkness and corruption, to fly from it with abhorrence.

This motive, however, was too weak to stem the general torrent, and extinguish in the hearts of men the impetuous violence of this passion. A more powerful remedy was necessary: and this remedy was the birth of a Saviour, whose ministry would withdraw mankind from the deep abyss of corruption, would exalt to honour the heavenly virtues of purity and chastity, would disengage the unhappy victims of this vice from their disgraceful bonds, and would open the gates of peace, by restoring to them the liberty and innocence, of which they had been deprived by their multiplied and abominable excesses. ——Jesus was born of a virgin, the most pure of all creatures. This circumstance alone was a

distinguishing encomium on a virtue, to which the world had hitherto been strangers,—a virtue, which was deemed a reproach even by his own people. But in addition to this, by taking upon himself our nature, he has incorporated himself, as it were, with us: we are become the members of his mystical body, and we are destined to sit with him on the right hand of the living God, and to glorify him for all eternity.

Exalted, then, dear Christians, is the degree of honour to which our flesh is raised by this mystery.—It is made the temple of God, the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, the portion of a body, in which the plenitude of the divinity resides; the object of the complacency and love of the Father. What a dignity! What an honour!—But do we not still continue to defile this temple? Do we not enslave to iniquity these members of Jesus Christ? Do we

respect our flesh the more, because it is made a sacred portion of the mystical body of our Lord?—Ah! this detestable passion exercises the same tyranny over Christians, who are the children of liberty, light, and holiness, as it formerly exercised over the children of darkness. The havoc it makes in all ranks and conditions is too well known to require description. It is the most universal passion, the most favoured passion. The loss of health, of peace, of content, of happiness, are insufficient motives to arrest its progress. The justice of God, the goodness and love of God, the hopes of heaven, the remorse of conscience, the fears of hell, are considerations too weak to resist its attacks.—Oh! if you are solicitous to enjoy that peace which our Saviour purchased on this day for mankind, banish the impure spirit from your hearts; follow the paths of innocence, and you will experience a tranquillity

and happiness, which is unknown to the children of lust.

3. Lastly, the birth of Jesus reconciles the world to his Father; it unites together the Jew and the Gentile; it abolishes the odious distinction of Greek and Barbarian; it extinguishes hatreds and enmities; of all nations, it makes but one people; of all disciples, but one heart and one soul.—— Formerly, mankind were united together by no common band of amity and union. The diversity of religions, of manners, of country, of language, and interest, had, in some degree, diversified in them the same common nature. They exterminated each other like wild beasts; they placed their glory in slaughtering their fellow creatures, and carrying their bleeding heads in triumph, as trophies of their victory. It seemed as if they had received their existence from distinct and irreconcileable creators, who placed them here below

for no other purpose than to espouse their quarrel, and terminate the contest by the total extinction of one of the parties.

Jesus, therefore, is come to be our peace, our reconciliation, the corner stone, to support and compact the whole edifice; the living head, to direct all the members, and form all mankind into one body. Every thing tends to unite us to him, and every thing that unites us to him, unites and reconciles us to each other. We are all animated by the same spirit, the same hope is our common consolation, and we partake of the same divine food. We are enclosed in the same sheepfold, and are led to pasture by the same shepherd. We are children of the same father, heirs of the same promise, citizens of the same eternal city, and members of the same body.

These are sacred bonds indeed. But, my beloved, have they hitherto been

sufficient to unite us together in peace? Far otherwise: Christianity, which ought to unite all hearts, which ought to be the connecting link of the faithful among themselves, and of Jesus with them—Christianity, which ought to reflect the image of the peace which reigns above—Christianity itself is a scene of carnage and devastation. Whilst the idolater and the pagan are reposing under their fig-trees in the arms of peace, the inheritors of the promises, the children of peace, are advancing against each other with fire and sword. Ambition stimulates the rulers to begin the contest; and a false glory inspires the combatants to drench their swords in the blood of their fellow Christians.

This is not all: even within the precincts of towns and families, the hearts and affections of men are as little united, as between kingdoms.—Animosities are perpetuated between fa-

milies; dissensions are fostered in cities; injuries and affronts are every where revenged; reconciliations and sincere forgiveness are extraordinary events; detraction, back-biting, and slander, infect every company, and enter into every conversation; self-interest is the motive of every action; and the humiliations and sufferings of a neighbour are matters of indifference, provided they do not operate as obstacles to our own advancement. This is the unhappy state of the christian world.—Thus, my friends, you see that Jesus has descended on earth in vain. He came to bring us peace: he bequeathed it to us for our inheritance: his favourite injunction was mutual forgiveness and love. But, alas! peace and union, and brotherly love, are banished from amongst us. Religion, which endows an enemy with the endearing qualities of a brother, is no longer attended to: the

menace of experiencing from the hand of God the same severity with which we treat our offending brethren, has no effect on our minds; and in defiance of every consideration, hatred and dislikes retain possession of our hearts. We live on in this state without fear or apprehension: the imaginary justice of our cause calms our conscience, and shuts our eyes to the injustice and criminality of our hatred and aversion: and if, at the point of death, we form a reconciliation, or publicly declare before our surrounding attendants that we forgive them, the motive that actuates us is, not that we love them as we love ourselves, but either that the power of perpetuating our hatred is about to be taken from us, or that we shudder at the idea of appearing before the tribunal of God with a conscience avowedly defiled with gall and bitterness.

Let us, my dearly beloved, throw

ourselves into the arms of our infant Jesus: let us enter into the spirit of this mystery: let us give to God the glory which belongs to him. This is the only means of regaining the peace, of which our passions have deprived us, and of acquiring a title to the peace which is prepared for us in the world to come.

THE CIRCUMCISION.

ON THE DIVINITY OF JESUS CHRIST.

His name was called Jesus, which was called by the angel. . . . Luke ii. 21.

HOW is reason astonished and confounded at the sight of a God assuming the form of a creature! and into what a labyrinth of errors would it not have precipitated itself, had not the light of faith disclosed the depth of the divine Wisdom, which is concealed under the supposed folly of a God-man!——It may, perhaps, be deemed superfluous to enter on this subject before a christian auditory,

whose eyes have been always open to this heavenly light, and to combat arguments against the divinity of Christ, which none of you have ever maintained. It undoubtedly would, if I had no other motive than that of enforcing conviction. But there are other motives which render the discussion necessary, and, in some degree, obligatory on the part of the pastor. The spirit of infidelity is making the most alarming progress. The Unitarian and the Deist have risen up in opposition to the Christ, the Holy One: and although your faith is now firm and unshaken, it is not impossible but that their captious arguments may insensibly produce an unfavourable effect on your minds. It is the duty, therefore, of the pastor to guard you against this danger, and to supply you with proper arguments, should their blasphemous tenets be broached in your presence.—It is, likewise, of the greatest utility

sometimes to unveil the sanctuary, and display the hidden beauties which religion proposes for your respect and homage: sometimes to console your piety, by recounting the wonders of Him, who is the Author and Finisher of your faith; and to animate your fervour, by exhibiting to you the glory and divinity of the Mediator, who is the object of your hope and consolation.

That Christ is God, I will prove from his ministry: and that he is descended from heaven, and is equal to the Father, I will demonstrate from the object of his mission.

The subject is too extensive to allow me to discuss every point. I must omit the pompous oracles by which he was foretold, and the wonderful works which he performed in person: these I must omit, and confine myself to the spirit of his ministry, namely, to his doctrine, his benefits, and his promises. The first shall form the subject of this

discourse, and the others I will reserve for a future occasion.

1. The Almighty manifested himself to creatures for the purpose of imparting to them the inestimable knowledge of his divinity, and of instructing them in the duties which they owed to him as their Lord and Maker. Religion, therefore, properly speaking, is the divine light which displays God to man, and regulates the duties of man to God. Whether the Most High disclose these truths to mankind in person, or by the ministry of some extraordinary personage invested with the power of the Holy Spirit, his object in view was the knowledge and sanctification of his name in the world, and the establishment of a religion, by which might be given to him alone what to him alone was due.

This incontestable truth being acknowledged, I say, that, if our Lord Jesus, who came in the fulness of time,

be not God, but a mere creature, selected by God to be his envoy on earth, he has acted in direct opposition to the intentions of his Great Employer: he has made the world idolaters: he has wrested from the Deity the glory which is due to him alone, and arrogated it to himself. Or rather, if we consider the ministry, the doctrine, the benefits, and the promises of Jesus, we must declare that God himself, who sent him on earth, vested with such unlimited power and glory, has deceived us, and that he alone is the cause of the idolatry of those who adore him.

But, my beloved, who will dare to impute to God such a crime? It is, therefore, an inevitable consequence, that if Jesus Christ be holy, he must be likewise God; and, if his ministry be not the ministry of error and imposture, it must be the ministry of eternal truth itself, manifested for our instruction.——The enemies of his divinity

are ready to acknowledge that he was a holy and just man: and, although there have been some of late years who have blasphemed against his innocence, and have dared to rank him amongst seducers, their names are held in abhorrence, and their memory is deserving of the detestation of all who have ever confessed the name of Christ.

In effect, what man ever appeared on earth decorated with such indubitable marks of innocence and sanctity? In what philosopher was ever discovered such a love for virtue,—such a sincere contempt of the world,—such charity for mankind,—such an indifference to human glory,—such interest for the glory of the Supreme Being,—such an elevation above all that the world admires and seeks after? How ardent was his zeal for the salvation of men! To this object were referred his discourses, his cares, his desires, his solicitudes. The wise men of old exercised their ge-

nius, and acquired a reputation by exposing the weakness and follies of their fellow creatures: Jesus speaks of their vices only for the purpose of prescribing remedies. The philosophers took occasion of pride, from discovering vices in others from which they themselves were not exempt: Jesus, with a heart melting with compassion, points out faults in others, of which he himself was innocent; and sheds tears over the immoralities of a faithless and ungrateful city. The object of the philosophers was not so much the reformation of the morals of men, as the desire of acquiring a great name by the superiority of their talents and wisdom: Jesus seeks only to save lost man, and, in the pursuit of this object, is as insensible to the calumnies and persecutions of his enemies, as he is to the applause and commendation of his admirers.

Enter into the whole detail of his

moral conduct, and tell me whether there ever appeared on earth a just man more universally exempt from weaknesses the most inseparable from human nature? The more you scrutinize, the more incontrovertible will his sanctity appear. The disciples, who were the most intimately acquainted with his conduct, were the most astonished at the innocence of his life: and familiarity, which discovers faults in the most heroic virtue, contributed only to the more perfect knowledge of his perfections. On all occasions he speaks the language of heaven; and all his replies are calculated to promote the salvation of those who question him. Never does he exhibit symptoms of mental weakness: he always appears in the quality of Ambassador of the Most High. In him, the most common actions are rendered extraordinary by the novelty and sublimity of the dispositions with which he performs

them. He appears not less divine when he eats with a Pharisee, than when he raises Lazarus to life.—— Truly, my brethren, mere human nature is not susceptible of such sublimity; nor can it so perfectly divest itself of the weakness to which it is constitutionally liable. He does not dazzle the understanding by the display of eloquence and sophistry, like the philosophers: but, like a truly just man, he draws the rules and precepts of his doctrine from his own conduct. What greater proofs of his sanctity could be given, than that the traitor himself, whose interest it was to exculpate himself by exposing his master's defects, should give public testimony in his favour; and that the malice of his most declared enemies should not be able to accuse him of any crime? *John* viii. 46.

Jesus Christ, therefore, being holy, he must consequently be God: otherwise, the doctrine which he taught,

as well respecting his Father, as respecting the duties of man, would be no more than equivocations, calculated to lead mankind into the grossest errors.

2. Now, what was his doctrine respecting the Father? Moses and the prophets incessantly proclaimed that the Lord was the One Great All; that it was an impiety to debase him by a comparison with any of his creatures; and that they themselves were his servants and envoys, — humble instruments in the performance of the wonders which he wrought by their ministry. Not a doubtful expression escaped them respecting this most essential point of their mission: no comparison between themselves and the Supreme Being: no equivocal term, which could give rise to superstition and idolatry, by inducing the people to believe they were equal to the God in whose name they spoke.

If Jesus Christ were like them, a messenger sent from God, and nothing more, it was certainly incumbent on him to fulfil his ministry with equal fidelity. But what is his language? he proclaims himself equal to the Father, (*Matt.* xi. 27.): he says, that he is descended from heaven, (*John* vi. 51.); that he proceeds from the bosom of God, (*John* xvi. 28.); that eternal life depends on knowing the Son, as well as on knowing the Father, (*John* xvii. 3.); that he was before Abraham, (*John* viii. 58.); that he was before all things, (*John* xvii. 5.); that he and the Father are one, (*John* x. 30.); and that whatever is done by the Father, is done by the Son likewise, (*John* v. 19.)—— What prophet, except Christ, ever held such extraordinary language? Who, except Jesus, ever attributed to his own strength the great wonders which the Lord wrought by his ministry?— How consoling is it, my beloved, to

behold the certitude on which our faith is founded! — Jesus on all occasions places himself on a level with the Deity. Once, indeed, he says, that the Father is greater than him: but what would this mean, were he not himself a God incarnate? What man of sense would dare to insult our understanding, by seriously asserting that the Supreme Being was greater than he? Are we not all sensible that there is no proportion between God and man? between the great ALL, and created nothing? Jesus, however, does not content himself with asserting that he is equal to God, but he justifies the novelty of his expressions, in opposition to the murmurs of the Jews, who were scandalized: and so far from undeceiving, he confirms them in their scandal: he every where speaks a language, which would be either senseless or impious, if his divinity were not admitted to explain and justify it. —— My friends,

would the pious, the meek, the humble Jesus have acted thus, if he were not God? Paul and Barnabas rent their garments when they were taken for Gods: they proclaimed aloud before the people, who were preparing to offer sacrifices to them, that they were nothing more than mortal men; and that God alone ought to be adored, of whom they were only the envoys and ministers, (*Acts* xiv. 14.) The angel in the Apocalypse rejected the adoration of St. John with horror, and with a loud voice commanded him *to adore God alone*, (Apoc. xix. 10.) — But Jesus Christ unresistingly permits divine honours to be paid to him: he applauds the faith of his disciples, when they adore, and call him with St. Thomas, *My Lord, and my God*, (*John* xx 28.): he even confounds his enemies, when they dispute his divinity, and deny his eternal origin, (*John* viii.) And can it be supposed that Jesus was less zeal-

ous for the glory of Him that sent him, than his disciples were? Or was it less incumbent on him than on them, plainly to undeceive the people of a mistake so injurious to the Supreme Being, and by which the whole fruit of his ministry would be destroyed?

Ah! what benefit has Jesus conferred on the world, if he be not God? Has he not plunged mankind deeper into the abyss of idolatry? For by whom is he not adored as the eternal Son of the Father, the image of his substance, and the splendor of his glory? A small number only of men have existed amongst Christians, who received him merely as the envoy of God, and refused him divine honours. This impious sect, which has acquired the name of *Unitarian*, consists only of a few obscure disciples, whose doctrine is held in detestation, and rejected and anathematized by the whole christian world. —Recal to mind the great promises

which were so pompously announced to mankind, and tell me whether the small, the obscure society of Unitarians, can be that great people of every tongue, of every tribe, and of every nation, of which the Church of Jesus was to be formed? Where would then be that superabundance of grace, that plenitude of the Holy Spirit, which was to be spread over all flesh? Where would be that universal renovation, which the prophets foretold with such solemnity, and which was to accompany the birth of the great Deliverer? Are the great advantages, which the world was to acquire by the ministry of Jesus, confined within such contracted limits? Did the oracles of the prophets concerning the future magnificence of the gospel, mean nothing more than the formation of the sect of an impious Socinus?

My God! how wise, how reasonable does the faith of thy Church appear,

when put in opposition to the senseless contradictions of incredulity! How consoling is it to believe and hope in Jesus, when we behold the abyss which pride opens for itself, by preaching new doctrines, and sapping the foundation of the faith and hope of Christians!

Thus, dear brethren, you see that the doctrine of Jesus in respect to the Father proves the reality of his eternal origin.—When the prophets spoke of the great God of heaven and earth, they could not find words to express the grandeur and magnificence of their ideas. Lost in the contemplation of the immensity, the omnipotence, and the majesty of the Supreme Being, they exhausted the weakness of human language in describing the sublimity of their conceptions. This God, they said, is he who measures the waters of the ocean in the hollow of his hand; who weighs the moun-

tains in his balance, (*Isa.* xl. 12.); who speaks the word, and it is done, (*Ps.* xxxii. 9.) Thus they spoke; and it was fit that mortal man should speak of the eternal God in this manner.—But when Jesus speaks of the glory of the Lord, he adopts not the pompous descriptions of the prophets: on the contrary, the most tender, the most simple expressions are his choice. He calls him a holy Father—a just and clement Father—a shepherd seeking the lost sheep, and placing it on his shoulders to carry it back to the fold, (*Luke* xv. 4, 5.)—a father of a family, moved to compassion by the return and repentance of his prodigal child, (*Luke* xv.) This is the language of a *Son*. The freedom and simplicity of his expressions manifestly prove that he is acquainted with the secrets of heaven, and that the majesty and glory of the Divinity are familiar to him.

This affectionate language of Jesus

implies a severe condemnation of the sentiments of the greater number of Christians. We know that we are now no longer servants, but brethren, and coheirs with Jesus Christ; that we have acquired the right of calling God our Father, and ourselves his children. From this knowledge we learn that love, not fear, is to regulate our obedience. But, my beloved, in what manner do we avail ourselves of this glorious privilege? By what are we influenced? Ah! too true it is, that we serve him more like hirelings and slaves, than like children. We obey him, not because we are affected by his promises and love, but because we dread his judgments. His law, so holy and just, appears not amiable in our eyes: on the contrary, like a yoke it weighs heavy on our shoulders; it excites our complaints; and, if no punishment awaited our transgressions, we should soon shake it off, and rejoice at our

happy deliverance. We murmur incessantly against the severity of his precepts; and we employ every argument in order to justify the relaxations which the world has introduced. Thus, we may conclude that, if he were not an avenging God, we should renounce our allegiance to him, and that the little homage and respect we pay him, is extorted by the terrors of his justice and indignation.

3. We will now proceed to the proofs of his divinity which are deducible from his doctrine and instructions. It is not my intention to enlarge on the wisdom, the sanctity, the sublimity of this doctrine: I will only remark that, the whole does honour to reason, and to the soundest philosophy: that the whole is proportioned to the weakness, and to the excellency of man; to his wants, and to his high destiny: that the whole inspires a contempt for perishable things, and a love of the good

things of eternity: that the whole is calculated to maintain order and tranquillity in the world: that the whole is grand, because the whole is true. The wise man of the gospel is excited to the performance of good actions, by the only satisfaction of obeying God, who will be his reward exceeding great; and he is taught to prefer the testimony of a good conscience before the applauses of men: he is superior to the whole world by the liveliness of his faith; and he is inferior to the last of men in his modest opinion of himself. Glory in his eyes is fallacious; prosperity is replete with dangers; afflictions are blessings; the earth is a place of banishment; and all that passes with time is no more than a dream.—What man, before Christ, ever delivered such doctrine? And if his disciples, who only announced his precepts, were taken for gods descended on earth, (*Acts* xiv.

10.) what ought to be our opinion of Him who was the author of them?

But we will pass over these general reflections, and proceed to the more precise testimonies of love and dependance, which he requires should be paid to him, as well as to the Father.—— He commands us to love him in the same manner as he loved the Father, (*John* xv. 10.)—to refer all our actions, our thoughts, our desires, and even our whole selves to his glory, in the same manner as to the Father, (*Matt.* x. *et alibi.*);—he even declares that sins are remitted only in proportion as we love him, (*Luke* vii. 47.)—What prophet, before Christ, ever said to mankind: You shall love me in the same degree as you love the Father; every thing that you do, you shall do for my glory?

But this is not all that he requires. It is his command, not only that we

love him, but that we give testimonies of the most generous, the most heroic love; that we love him more than we love our relations, our friends, our goods, our life, more than the whole world, more even than we love our own souls, (*Luke* xiv. 26.) He declares that the Christian who is not so disposed, is not worthy of him; and that he who places him on a level with creatures, or even with himself, dishonours and injures him, and shall never partake of his promises.

My friends, who but a God could impose such commands? Life is the gift of the Most High; and who, but the Most High, can exact the sacrifice of it? Jesus, however, commands us to suffer tortures and death for his name, and with the authority of a God, declares, that if we renounce him before men, although it be to avoid the greatest evils, he will renounce us before his Father, (*Matt.* x. 33.) Ah! if the

hand of God were not with him, if he were not the Word made flesh, can it be supposed that people could have existed on earth so devoid of every natural feeling, so deaf to the tender calls of self-preservation, as to run with extasies of delight into the very jaws of destruction in support of such a doctrine? Can it be supposed that innumerable multitudes of every age, condition, and sex, would have foregone the sweetest pleasures of human nature, and have lingered out a miserable existence in caverns, in nakedness, and in want, in hourly expectation of being dragged to the torture, and to martyrdom, rather than renounce their belief in the divinity of Jesus the Son of God? Can it be supposed that such a doctrine, had it been erroneous, could have triumphed over the universe, confounded all sects, united all hearts, and have been acknowledged by the wisest men to be

superior to all science, wisdom, and doctrine that ever appeared on earth? No: the ear of rational man cannot listen to such suppositions; it turns from them with abhorrence.

How consoling, my beloved, is it to see the veil of the sanctuary withdrawn, and to behold the stability of the foundation on which our faith and hope are founded!

One reflection shall conclude this discourse. Since we confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, it is our indispensable duty to follow his doctrine. This doctrine requires that we sacrifice to him our will, our friends, our relations, our property, our lives, and every other thing that impedes our progress in the paths of salvation. Faith teaches us that he will make us ample amends for all that we relinquish for his sake; or rather, that he will give us himself, the greatest of all treasures —the most exquisite of all rewards.

Let us, therefore, confess Christ, by acknowledging that he is greater than the world, that he is more able to make us happy, and consequently, more worthy of being loved: let us confess him in this manner both in word and deed, and then we may rest assured that he will confess us before his Father, and unite us to the happy society of his elect in the kingdom of heaven.

SUNDAY BEFORE THE EPIPHANY.

ON THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST.

His name was called Jesus, which was called by the angel. Luke ii. 21.

THIS, my beloved, is the sacred name given to the great Messiah — the Saviour of the human race: this is the name, which God himself hath chosen for his only Son: this is the name, at the sound of which every knee shall bend, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and in hell, (*Phil.* ii. 10.) This sacred name you all revere; and from your infancy you have confessed that Jesus Christ is in

the glory of God the Father, (*Phil.* ii. 11.) Jesus the Son of God, has always been the object of your adoration, the Author and Finisher of your faith, (*Heb.* xii. 2.) and the completion of your hope even to the end, (*Heb.* vi. 11.) In him have been centered all your desires, all your expectations. From him you have sought consolation in distress, refreshment in labour, patience in sufferings, and joy in afflictions. From his bountiful hand you acknowledge that you have received all the blessings and comforts of your life: and that your crosses and adversities have proceeded from no other source than his merciful justice. Your morning sighs have been all wafted before his throne; and your evening lamentations have been poured forth at the foot of his cross. His sacred wounds have preserved you from the horrors of despair; and his austere doctrine and example have repressed

in your bosom the pleasing, but delusive dreams of presumption. In him, and for him, you have lived, and moved, and in his embraces, and through his merits you continue to look forward with joyful hope to a blissful immortality. In a word, you have always considered Jesus as truly God, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, made man for your redemption. These are your grounded sentiments. This has always been your creed.

If, therefore, I pursue the subject of my last discourse, let it not be supposed that I am actuated by the senseless desire of convincing you of a truth, of which I acknowledge you are already convinced; or that I undertake to resolve doubts, which I know have never existed in your minds: no; the real motive, which induces me to lay before you the arguments in proof of the divinity of Jesus

is no other than the desire of consoling your faith, of displaying before your eyes the great blessings, which are ensured to you by the incarnation of a God, and of arming you against the insidious and sophistical arguments of modern infidelity.

In my discourse on the late festival, I deduced my proofs from the doctrine of Jesus; I will now apply to another source, namely, the *benefits*, which Jesus conferred on mankind by his personal ministry on earth, and the *magnificent promises*, which he held out, of still greater blessings after his ascension into heaven.

1. The benefits which Jesus was appointed to impart to the world form one of the most incontrovertible proofs of his divinity.—He was sent to deliver men from eternal death: he was sent to blot out the hand-writing that was against them, to reverse the sentence of malediction, and to make them chil-

dren of God: he was sent to open for them the gates of heaven, and to admit them into a partnership of glory with the angels in the bosom of the divinity. These ineffable gifts he was to dispense not to one generation only, but to every succeeding generation to the end of the world. We, as well as our forefathers, are to find in him the remedy for all our evils: his sacred body is to be our food, and the application of his precious blood is to wash away all our defilements, and to restore peace and innocence to our souls. It is he who continues to appoint and consecrate pastors for our guidance in the paths of virtue: it is he who inspires teachers, by whose ministry we are instructed in the secrets of salvation: it is he who raises up, from time to time, living models of perfection, whose example is intended to animate us to fight with determined resolution against our spiritual enemies. He is always present

with us (*Matt.* xxviii. 20.) for our comfort and support in this place of banishment: he is our way, our truth, and our life, (*John* xiv. 6.): he is our justification, our redemption, and our light, (*John* viii. 12.) This is the doctrine of the scripture respecting the Messiah. — Now, my beloved brethren, would it have been consistent with the wisdom of God to have conferred such power, such authority on any being that was merely human? Would his jealousy have permitted that a mortal man should be the author and the source of so many gifts and graces, and that he should assume a character of such independence, and self-existence? Would not his omniscience have foreseen that the great Messiah, so far from effecting the redemption of the world, would plunge it deeper into the horrors of idolatry, and shut up every remaining avenue to the light of heaven? Yes, my be-

loved: God foresaw all this; he knew that man would prostrate himself, and pay divine honours to the author of such inestimable blessings; he, therefore, sent his only Word, the second Person of the adorable Trinity.

There are many, I presume, of my present hearers, who have but an imperfect idea of the nature, and the extent of paganism. For their instruction, therefore, it will not be foreign to my subject to state, that, before the coming of Christ, the greater part of mankind were ignorant of the true God. The voice of nature loudly proclaimed to all, that there existed a Supreme Being: but what this Supreme Being was, human nature, unassisted by revelation, could not discover. The secrets of heaven were involved in impenetrable darkness, and man was left to follow the dictates of his own mind. He knew that he himself was dependent, and that submission was due to him on

whom he depended. From this great Being he knew must be derived whatever might befal him ultimately of good or evil, and he rightly supposed that gratitude for the past was the only way of ensuring the continuance of a favourable interposition in future, and of averting the calamities, which he imagined would otherwise be his unhappy portion. When, therefore, he perceived that any visible thing, whether inanimate, animate, or human, was the channel, through which great blessings were conveyed to him, he concluded that the Deity assumed that shape in order to communicate his gifts: hence, by a natural transition, he represented and adored him under that shape. It was this that induced some nations to adore the sun; others, the moon and stars; others, the earth from which they received their nourishment; others, the cow, the ass, the dog. Others supposed that great and

good princes, and the inventors of useful arts were gods, and for this reason adored Jupiter, Hercules, Cybele, Vulcan, Mars, Mercury, &c. In a word, during those dark times of ignorance and blindness, man seemed to sigh after the knowledge of the true God; and, even while the Author of his existence was unknown to him, he did not forget the sentiments of gratitude and dependance which the voice of nature suggested towards him.—Thus, we see that the origin of the false gods of idolatry was gratitude on the part of man; and that his ignorance of the true and living God was the only reason why he did not worship him.

From this short account, my argument to you is simply as follows. No man ever conferred such inestimable blessings on mankind as Jesus. He has purchased for us an eternal peace: he has imparted to us happiness, justice, and

truth: he has renewed the face of the whole earth: his favours are not confined to one people, or to one generation, they are extended to every nation, and to every age; and, what is more, these inestimable blessings he purchased for us at no less a price than that of his precious blood.—If, therefore, gratitude exalted the mere instruments of the mercies of God to the rank of divinities, surely no one was more entitled to that distinction than Jesus. Ah! my beloved, if Jesus be no more than man, could God have seriously intended to redeem the world, at the time that he exposed it to the most imminent danger of idolatry?

If, indeed, Jesus had admonished his disciples before his death that they were indebted to the Great God alone for so many benefits; that he himself was not the author and source, but only the minister employed for the distribution of these graces; that no

extraordinary honours were due to him, but that the glory, and honour, and gratitude were due to God alone; then, I allow, there would have been no danger of our falling into error. But Christ does not terminate his prodigies, and ministry by any such admonitions. On the contrary, he not only commands his disciples to remember him, and even place their hopes in him after his decease; but at the moment that he is about to take his final leave, he declares that he will be present with them all days, even to the consummation of the world, (*Matt.* xxviii. 20.): he promises them greater blessings than any he had hitherto imparted, and unites them to him still more strongly by indissoluble, and eternal bands.

2. Reflect an instant, my beloved, on the wonderful promises, which he made to his disciples, and you will see that they portend greater blessings

than any that he had imparted to them during his mortal existence.

In the first place, he promises that he will send to them the Paraclete, the Comforter, whom he calls the Spirit of the Father, and the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive, (*John* xiv.) ;—the Spirit of fortitude, which would animate his followers to suffer martyrdom for his sake ;—the Spirit of understanding, which had enlightened the prophets ;—the Spirit of wisdom, which would lead his church into all truth ; — the Spirit of peace, and charity, which would unite all hearts, and establish the bands of fraternal love between all the faithful.— What a promise was this ! Could man pretend to dispose of the Spirit of God, unless he himself likewise were God, and the Spirit were his Spirit ? The promise, however, is immediately fulfilled. No sooner is Jesus ascended into heaven, than the Spirit of God descends on his

disciples. Simple, and ignorant men in an instant acquire a wisdom, that is superior to the wisdom of the wisest of men: the weak display a courage that is proof against all the tortures of the most cruel tyrants. New men, animated with a new spirit, appear on the earth: they draw all people after them: they change the face of the whole universe.

In the second place, Jesus promises to his disciples the power of remitting sins; of opening the gates of heaven to the just man, and of shutting them against the sinner. Surely, my brethren, this is the work of Omnipotence itself. Who but God can forgive sins? And who but God, can give power to weak man to exert such authority? But this is not all. He promises to his disciples the gift of miracles, the power of raising the dead to life, of giving sight to the blind, health to the sick, speech to the dumb, and of exercising

an unlimited command over nature. This promise, likwise, is immediately fulfilled. The disciples wrought every wonder which he had enumerated; and they wrought them, not in the name of the Father, but in the name of Jesus who was crucified.

To all these promises, he adds another of still greater magnitude. He assures them that the conversion of the world, and the complete triumph of the cross shall be effected by their preaching: he declares that, at his name the knee shall bend of all that are great, or proudly eminent on earth; and that his gospel shall be received by the whole universe. Pause awhile, my brethren, and consider the extent of this promise. Who but a God can exercise dominion over the hearts of all mankind, and foretel that an universal change of sentiment would take place —a change, of which no example had ever before been known? The unbeliever perhaps may say, that this

great event was revealed to him by God, after the same manner as future events were revealed to the prophets. But no: for, if he is no God, he certainly is no prophet. The truth of his predictions rests entirely on the truth of his divinity. — He foretold, that all people sitting in the shades of death would open their eyes to the light: this prediction is false, if he be not God; for the people from the beginning made him the object of their adoration, and thus fell into a more criminal darkness. He foretold that his Father would be glorified, and that his gospel would form a society of believers out of every nation, and tongue, who would adore him in spirit and truth: this prediction likewise is false; for the whole christian world have dishonoured the Father by prostituting their adoration to the prophet, and will continue to dishonour him even to the end. He foretold that the idols would be thrown

down: and ought he not to have foreseen that he himself would be exalted in their stead? He foretold that he would form a holy people out of every tribe and nation under the sun: but if he were a prophet, and nothing more than a prophet, ought he not to have foreseen that, by his coming, he would only form a new sect of idolaters? Ought he not to have foreseen, that the innumerable multitudes in every age, who would be converted by the preaching, and miracles of his disciples, would place *him* on the throne of the living God; would refer all their actions, and their homages to *him*; would have *his* glory continually in view; would wish to live only in *him*, and for *him*; would depend on *him* alone, would look up to *him* for power, strength, and motion; in a word, would adore and love *him* more spiritually, more universally, and more intimately, than the pagans ever adored,

and loved their idols? Ah! my beloved, if Jesus be not God, he is not even a prophet: and if he be no prophet, he is deserving of all the opprobrious epithets, which have been lavished on him by the worst of those, who are, or who ever were in the list of his opponents.

These are the extremes to which incredulity leads its unhappy votaries. If you destroy the foundation, or remove the corner-stone, which is Jesus Christ the eternal Son of the living God, the whole edifice falls to the ground. If you reject the doctrine of a God made man, you deprive faith of its merit, hope of its consolation, and charity of its motives. The first disciples clearly foresaw all these dismal consequences: and therefore they exerted every power of eloquence against the impious wretches who dared to call in question the divinity of their master. They knew that the doctrine of an

Ebion, and Cerinthus, tended to destroy the very spirit of their religion, to deprive them of their only consolation under persecutions, and sufferings, to do away their assurance of a future recompense, and in the end to reduce their exalted pretensions to a mere nothing. They knew that, if this grand article of their belief, namely, the divinity of Jesus, were rejected, their religion would be vain, and that it would be no more than a human doctrine, the work of a man, who, like other founders of sects, would have left no other inheritance to his disciples than the honour of being distinguished by his name.

So great was their zeal in defence of this doctrine, that the pagans themselves made it the subject of their reproaches. Pliny, a Roman proconsul, and a celebrated writer, (*Plin. Ep.* i. 1.) in an account which he transmitted to the Emperor Trajan concerning the morals and doctrine of Christians,

readily allows that they were just, innocent, and upright men; that they assembled together before sun rise, not to form plans of depredation, or of civil commotion, but for the purpose of living piously and justly, of exciting each other to mutual detestation of frauds, adulteries, and desires of other men's goods. The only pretended fault of which he accuses them is, that they sung hymns and canticles in honour of Jesus Christ, and paid to him the same homage as to God himself.—If the first Christians had not given divine honour to Jesus Christ, they would undoubtedly have refuted this calumny: they would have removed from their religion every appearance of the kind: they would have discontinued a practice which they knew to be the greatest—if not the only circumstance, that could operate as a scandal to the Jews, and a stumbling block to the Gentiles: they would

have proclaimed aloud: "We do not adore Jesus Christ; far be it from us to give to creatures the honour which is due to God alone." But they were silent: they did not attempt to exculpate themselves. Their apologists refuted every other calumny, which the pagans had thrown upon their doctrine: they justified themselves on every other point: they explained, they refuted the most trivial accusations; and by their public addresses delivered to the Senate imposed silence on all their other enemies. But they say nothing respecting their idolatry towards the person of Christ: they are not moved by the reproach of adoring a crucified man—a reproach, which must have been most severely felt by men, who were so holy, such declared enemies to idolatry, and so jealous of the glory of God. They not only do not vindicate themselves, but they justify the accusation by their silence: but why do

I say, *by their silence?* They publicly declare their belief by the most unequivocal testimonies: they suffer for his name: they die for his name: they confess him before tyrants and persecutors: they expire with joy on racks and gibbets, in the consoling expectation of being hereafter united to him, and of receiving from him a life of greater glory and happiness, than the one which they sacrificed for his name. When these truly virtuous men were required to bend their knees before the statues of Cæsar, when even, out of a mistaken compassion, their friends proposed to give false testimony before the magistrates, asserting that they had offered sacrifice to idols, they declared that they were ready to suffer every species of torture and death, rather than commit or mislead the people into a supposition that they had committed such a crime. And shall it be believed

that men like these would have suffered themselves to be accused of paying divine honours to Jesus, without endeavouring to refute the calumny?— Let the enemies of our religion fancy what they will, not a corner of the universe, I am very sure, but would have resounded with their protests, and protestations against the infamy of so detestable a charge. No torment can be thought of, no sort of death, in any of its most formidable shapes, and frightful appearances, can be imagined, to which they would not most willingly have exposed themselves, rather than give occasion to so odious, so execrable a suspicion. What can incredulity oppose to this? Yes, my beloved, it is an incontrovertible truth, that the belief in the divinity of Jesus began with the Church, that it raised the whole edifice of Christianity, that it formed the whole host of martyrs, and that it renewed the face of the universe.

Now that I have displayed the proofs of this great principle of our religion before your eyes, I will conclude with this only reflection.—Jesus Christ being the grand object of the piety of Christians, it is the indispensable duty of every one of you to be familiar with his doctrine, and obedient to his precepts. You ought to meditate frequently and attentively on his holy law, to have recourse to him in all your necessities, to nourish your souls with his holy sacraments, and to place your whole reliance on the merits of his death, and passion. This is clean religion: this is knowing Jesus: this is simple and sincere piety: nothing is firm and solid but what is built on this foundation. Reflect, therefore, dear Christians, that the principle homage which Jesus requires of you is, that you be like unto him, and that his life be the model of yours: and be assured that, if you

be thus conformable to his likeness in this life, you will be of the number of those who are to be partakers of his glory in the next.

THE EPIPHANY.

We have seen his star in the East, and are come to adore him.—Matt. ii. 2.

THE light of divine truth, which was prefigured by the illustrious appearance of the star of Jacob, is alone worthy of the attention and solicitude of man. By its beams our souls are enlightened, the source of true pleasure is laid open to view, the solid basis, on which alone we can found our hopes, is disclosed, and the only lasting remedy for all our evils is revealed. This heavenly truth alone is the consolation of the innocent, and the reprover of the guilty: this alone immortalizes those who love it; en-

nobles the chains of those who suffer for it; and gives respectability to the abjection and poverty of those who leave all to follow it: this alone gives birth to noble sentiments, inspires true heroism, and forms characters of which the world is not worthy.

With what solicitude, therefore, ought we to labour for the acquisition of such a treasure: with what resolution and zeal ought we to manifest it to others; and with what vigilance and circumspection ought we to guard it when possessed!

It is astonishing, however, to observe the different impressions which are caused by the manifestation of this heavenly light on the minds of men. To some it is a light which enlightens, and makes the duties which it manifests agreeable and easy. To others, it is an unwelcome light, and by its appearance creates uneasiness and sorrow. To others, it is like a thick cloud, which

only excites their indignation, and completes their blindness.

These various effects are exemplified in the gospel of this festival. In the three kings, we behold men, who open their hearts to receive the light of truth with sincerity and readiness: in the priests, men who either shut their eyes, or pretend that they do not see it; and in Herod, a dreadful example of obduracy and wickedness.

The same effects are daily witnessed among Christians at the present time. Some few receive it with joy, like the wise men; others conceal it through worldly motives; and others persecute it, by their scandalous lives and irregular discourses. I will call your attention to these three descriptions of people in this discourse; and from their conduct I will draw a faithful sketch of the duties and obligations which the manifestation of the truth evidently points out to all Christians

as essentially connected with their future happiness.

1. The light of truth is manifested to all, even to the most profligate livers; and points out in the clearest manner the way in which we should walk in order to fulfil the will of God. However deeply some men may be engulphed in the abyss of sensuality and vice, their eyes are sometimes opened to the vanity of their pursuits, to the splendid hopes which they renounce, and to the dreadful state which awaits them in the world to come. But the only effect which these rays of light produce in men of this description, is an increase of guilt; for, instead of availing themselves of the proffered blessing, they shut their eyes again, and basely continue on in the career of vice.

In the wise men we behold examples of a ready correspondence with the calls and inspirations of heaven;—il-

lustrious examples indeed, and worthy to be proposed to the imitation of all Christians. Living, as they did, at an immense distance from the chosen people of God, they probably had no other knowledge of a Redeemer to come, than what was derived from the prophecy of Balaam, or from the communications which their forefathers received from the Israelites during their captivity in the East. These traditions, however, may be supposed to have made little impression on the minds of men, who, by their public profession of wisdom, were habituated to despise popular and vague opinions, and to attribute them to the credulity of the ignorant.—But, no sooner did the star of Jacob appear; no sooner did the secret inspirations of the Holy Spirit inform them that it denoted the birth of the Great Leader, than they believed, and prepared to set out without delay to pay their homage to him.

They examine not whether the apparition could be accounted for in a natural way. No time was lost in solving difficulties: none in defence of so extraordinary a project: they listened not to the scoffs and derisions which a measure so unprecedented may reasonably be supposed to have drawn upon them: what might be said, or thought of them by others, was not an object for them to look to: they loved the truth: they saw the light that would conduct them to it; and heedless of every difficulty that attended them in the outset; and regardless of the perils that might await them in the many unknown regions through which they might have to pass, like men whose wisdom and fortitude was superior to every encounter, they rejoiced at the sight of the happy omen, and immediately followed it.

Were mankind as ready in these times to open their eyes to the light of

the heavenly star, which now shines with meridian splendor over the whole universe, how different would be the state of Christianity! But, alas! there are multitudes of Christians—I say it to our shame—there are multitudes of Christians who live in a state of uncertainty, or rather, are addicted to passions which impel them to call in question the truths which condemn their disorders: and this, for no other purpose than to silence the voice of conscience, which incessantly reproves them for their folly and inconsistency. Sometimes they assume an air of candour, and with a seeming eagerness submit their doubts to the examination of the learned. But their candour is counterfeit: they converse on the subject, not with the desire of being convinced of the truth, for of that they are already convinced, but in hopes of destroying that conviction by their sophistry. I acknowledge, in-

deed, that real doubts on points both of morality and faith may sometimes exist in the understanding; for illusion will frequently put on so plausible an appearance, that no little strength of discernment is required to discover the deception. Upon those occasions it is the duty of every one to seek advice from those who are established to discern between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. But then, we must make our enquiries like the wise men: we must be simple and undisguised; we must desire to be enlightened, and not flattered; we must seek the truth sincerely, before we shall find it.

But unhappily, this method of enquiry is very uncommon amongst Christians: and even amongst those who have renounced the dissipations of a worldly life, there are not a few to be found, who, I will say, are frequently strangers to it.—There is generally some favourite attachment, some im-

perfection, which keeps possession of the heart, and which we refuse to relinquish. This we describe to our director in such plausible terms, that it is manifest we seek not the truth sincerely, and that we should be sorry to find it. Hence originate those habitual imperfections in virtuous men, which excite the derision of worldlings, and occasion reproaches and censures to be thrown on piety itself.

Ah! beloved Christians, if we loved the truth, our first solicitude would be to discover every weakness and imperfection which are contradictory to its maxims: we should love, we should reverence the man who pointed out our defects, and sought to heal the wounds which rankled in our hearts. David paid the highest honours to the prophet Nathan, because he reproved him for his crimes; and treated him during the remainder of his life as his father and deliverer. The same should be our

conduct. But, alas! the man of God, who dares to reprove us, immediately forfeits our esteem. As long as he was silent in our regard, he was treated as an enlightened, prudent, charitable man; as a friend in every respect worthy of our confidence and esteem: like the precursor of our Lord in his remonstrances with the king of Galilee, he was listened to with pleasure as long as he did not interfere with our favourite passions; but no sooner does he say: *This is not lawful for you,* than all his former perfections vanish instantly from our sight, and nothing is any longer what it was before: his zeal is now enthusiasm; his charity, ostentation, or a vain complacency in censuring and opposing others; his piety, imprudence, or a cloak with which he conceals his pride; his ideas of truth, mere visionary forms, which he has mistaken for realities. Thus, it too frequently happens, that, al-

though we are interiorly convinced of the imperfect state of our souls, we cannot endure that others should reflect upon it. Like Saul, we require that Samuel should approve in public, what we ourselves condemn in private; and, by a corruption of heart, which is perhaps more criminal than the weaknesses themselves, we extinguish in the minds of others that light of truth, which we cannot extinguish in our own.—How few are actuated by the same uprightness and sincerity as the wise men!

Again, the light of truth is oftentimes manifested to us without effect, because we are influenced by the impression which it makes on others. We see no reason why we should act differently from other men; why we should pursue the light of the divine star with more eager steps than those around us. Sometimes, indeed, the clear light which it throws over our

past irregularities fills us with dismay; —we condemn ourselves;—we tremble at the idea of futurity;—we propose a change of life. But, no sooner is our attention engaged by the general example before us, than we resist the heavenly monitor, and ask with some surprise, whether heaven is to be purchased at a dearer rate by us, than it is by other people. We will not believe that the Christian is bound to shut his eyes to the corrupted ways of the world, and open them only to the duties and obligations of his calling. We will not believe that we shall inevitably lose our souls, if we live like the generality of men; that is, if we are conformed to the world, and are distinguished in nothing from the world: and the reason is, because we will not believe that the world is already judged, and that it is the great Antichrist which shall perish together with its head and members. Ah! how many

timid Christians are there, who dare not declare for heaven, because their change would be condemned by public example! How many, like Aaron in the desert, dance round the golden calf, and offer incense to an idol which they detest, merely because they have not courage to stand alone in the defence of truth! Senseless as we are! we look up to men, as if men were the truth, and as if we were to seek on earth, and not in heaven, like the wise men, the rule and light which ought to be our guide.

Small, indeed, is the number of those who, having discovered the truth, keep their attention permanently fixed upon it, and are dead to the world, to its empty pleasures, and to its vain pomps. Small, indeed, is the number of those, who find no delight but in the truth, and who make it their consolation in affliction, the end and recompense of all their labours, and

their principal and only solid enjoyment in this place of exile. — How truly vain, puerile, and disgusting is the world, with all its momentary pleasures, to the man who is enamoured of the truth of the eternal promises; who is convinced, that all that is not God, is not worthy of him; and that the earth is the land of consolation to those only, who will perish everlastingly. Nothing can delight such a man, but the prospect of immortal good: nothing can fix his attention, but what will last for ever: nothing can engage his affections, but what he can enjoy eternally.

2. It is the duty, therefore, of every Christian to open his eyes to the light of truth with sincerity, submission, and joy. But this is not all: after we are enlightened, we are bound to diffuse the light abroad for the benefit of our fellow-creatures. And so obligatory is this duty, that, if our neighbour be

confirmed in his bad habits either by our silence, or by our mean adulations, we become partakers of his sins, and shall be responsible for them before the tribunal of the Great Judge. An instance of such criminal behaviour is recorded for our instruction in this day's gospel. The priests and doctors were fully acquainted with the circumstances foretold by the prophets concerning the Messiah: and therefore, when consulted by Herod, they were bound to return an answer expressive of the whole truth. But what was their reply? They simply point out the place assigned for his birth, and conceal every other circumstance. They neither proclaim the happy tidings to the people, nor invite them by their own example to pay their homage to the new-born King. Restrained by their criminal timidity, they detain the truth of God in injustice, to their own condemnation.

The obligation of publishing the truth is imposed on all Christians. But, alas! by whom is it fulfilled? We imagine that no defence is required from us, when the children of error espouse the cause of the world in our presence; when they justify its maxims and abuses: when they arraign the severity of the gospel precepts; blaspheme what they do not understand; and assume the office of judges over that law, by which they themselves will hereafter be judged. But I here solemnly declare, that to be silent on those occasions, is to take part with the enemies of truth. For, to what purpose has God enlightened us? Was it exclusively for our own individual salvation? Far from it: his views were of much wider extent. He enlightened us, in order that our words and example should correct, or at least, reprove the irregularities of our relations, friends, masters, servants, and neigh-

bours. The blessings which he has bestowed on us, were intended to redound to the benefit of the country to which we belong, and to the age in which we live. He never raises up a vessel of election, without having in view the salvation or condemnation of many. He made us lights, for the express purpose that we should shine in the midst of the surrounding darkness; that we should perpetuate the knowledge of his truths among mankind, and give testimony to the wisdom and justice of his law, in opposition to the prejudices and vain thoughts of a profane world.

I acknowledge, indeed, that there is a time for silence, as well as a time for speaking, and that there are limits, beyond which the efforts of zeal would be imprudence. But I am shocked at the idea, that men who know and serve God, should be afraid of espousing the cause of truth, when they hear the

maxims of religion vilified, the good name of their neighbours injured, and the most criminal abuses of the world maintained and justified. I am shocked at the idea, that the world should have its declared partisans, and that no one should dare to proclaim himself the partisan of Jesus. — Ah! the truly just man is far exalted above every worldly consideration: his eye is fixed on heaven alone: the approbation of God is his only ambition: he fears nothing but remorse of conscience: he has respect for nothing but justice and truth: he was placed on earth in order to give testimony to the truth, and to that he will give testimony in the face of the whole world. The presence alone of the truly just man is capable of imposing silence on the most embit tered enemies of piety: his venerable appearance compels them to respect the broad seal of truth, which is stamped on his forehead; to stand in awe of

his dignified intrepidity; and to pay homage, at least by their silence and confusion, to that virtue which they refuse to follow. The Israelites, awed and confound in this manner in the midst of their profane dances and rejoicings round the golden calf, instantly ceased at the appearance of Moses descending from the mountain, armed only with the terrors of the law of the Lord, and of his eternal truths.—Take courage, then, my beloved; espouse boldly the cause of God, and suffer no species of irreligion to reign triumphant in your presence.

3. It was my design to call your attention to the conduct of the impious Herod after the departure of the wise men, and to prove to you at large that the same spirit of persecution, with which he was actuated on that occasion, is entertained by an infinite number of Christians at the present time; but on this head I shall make only one reflection.

The spirit of persecution, to which I allude, is not of persecution by the sword, for that spirit is unknown amongst christian brethren, but of persecutions by scandal; and of this kind the persecutions are widely extended, and destructive indeed. It is not improbable but that you yourselves may come under this class of persecutors, although you have not thrown off the reins of morality, nor given yourselves up to a reprobate sense. The scandal which is given by the declared advocate of vice, is undoubtedly great; but the scandal which is given by the imperfect follower of the gospel, is frequently more pernicious in its effects. If, therefore, you fulfil your duties with exterior marks of tepidity,—if you attempt to associate the world with Jesus Christ,—if you pretend to a life of piety, and at the same time follow the maxims of worldlings, you are persecutors of the truth: because, by your

example, you confirm the calumnies which are invented against the truly virtuous, and cause piety itself to be blasphemed by sinners;—you throw a shade over the beauties of truth;—you make it appear disgusting to those who are disposed to embrace it;—and you encourage the impenitence of those who are ready to seize the first pretext for deferring their conversion. In this nation, particularly, surrounded as you are by men who are separated from the church and temple of the Lord, you cause the words of the prophet Jeremy to be again accomplished: *the unfaithful Israel hath justified her soul in comparison of the treacherous Juda,* Jer. iii. 11. The unfaithful Israel, that is, your unbelieving neighbours, beholding in you, the inheritors of his promises, the same thirst after gold, the same love of the world, the same vanities and follies as in themselves, turn away from your religion, and con-

clude that it signifies not which, or what mode of faith they outwardly profess, since the moral conduct of all is the same.

Let me, therefore, my dearly beloved brethren, exhort you, with the apostle, so to regulate your deportment in the eyes of men, that, instead of ranking you among the workers of evil, they may be edified by the display of your good works, and open their hearts to the inspirations of God, when in his mercy he shall visit them with his graces. Impose silence on the enemies of your religion, by the innocence of your lives: convince the world that your piety is useful for all things; that it not only holds out the prospect of future happiness, but that it imparts peace and tranquillity of mind, the only pleasures worthy of enjoyment in this life.

Let us, therefore, give glory to the truth; and for this purpose, let us re-

ceive it with joy, like the wise men, the instant it is manifested to us: let us not detain it in injustice, like the priests, when it is our duty to discover it to others; and let us not persecute it, like Herod, by the imperfections and irregularities of our lives. Then, after having walked in its light during the time of our mortal pilgrimage, we shall be all hereafter sanctified together in truth, and consummated in charity.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

ON THE HOMAGE WHICH IS PAID TO VIRTUE BY THE WORLD.

I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercy of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing to God, your reasonable service; and be not conformed to this world. . . . . Rom. xii. 1, 2.

HAPPY should I be, beloved Christians, could I convince you that the service which God requires of you, is reasonable; and that not to be conformed to this world is the only means of attaining true honour and glory in the estimation both of God and man. But by what arguments can this be effected? The greater number of Christians are deterred from

the public profession of piety by the fear of what the world will say. The greater number of Christians are conformed to this world in order to avoid its censures and ridicule. How then shall I work an entire change in your sentiments; and convince you that virtue is applauded by the world; and that the just man has more to fear from its adulatory homage, and veneration, than from its derision and contempt? —Oh, had I the abilities of St. Paul, in what glowing colours would I exhibit before your eyes the reasonableness of this service! in what words would I describe the happy liberty, and peace of mind which attend the practice of virtue! how clearly would I expose the futility of those pretexts which you alledge in justification of your conformity with the world! and how satisfactorily would I prove, that every species of true honour, esteem, admiration, and applause among men would

attend your resolution, and exalt you far above the level, which you at present occupy among the followers of the world!

It is a fact, my beloved, that the world, averse as it is to the practice of virtue itself, has a respect for virtue in others: it envies the happiness of the just: it pays even public homage to their piety: and although its censures are sometimes loud, and contemptuous, they are never aimed at virtue itself, but at the weaknesses, and failings of its imperfect followers.

I readily allow that the scriptures declare that persecutions shall be the portion of all who live piously in Jesus Christ, (2 *Tim.* ii. 12.); and therefore, God forbid that, by describing the honours which attend the virtuous on earth, I should pretend to call in question the words of truth; or by denying that virtue is characterized by sufferings, deprive the just man of one of

the most persuasive motives to patient endurance under the many trials to which his piety is exposed. But the persecutions, which he experiences from the world, are not necessarily confined, says St. Augustin, to contempt and derision. They more frequently consist in the display of false charms, which endanger his innocence: they more frequently consist in flattering inducements, and solicitations to vice: they more frequently consist in scandals authorized by custom, which are calculated either to weaken his piety, or at least to embitter his days with sorrow. Various, therefore, are the species of persecutions; reproaches, and contempt are neither the most dangerous nor the most common.

Although the world is the declared enemy of Jesus Christ: although in practice it knows not God: although it calls good evil, and evil good; nevertheless, worldly as it is, it enter-

tains a respect for virtue, it forms the highest opinion of the happiness of the just man, flies to his society for refuge and consolation in its distress, and frequently pays public homage to him.

1. It must not be supposed that error and corruption have so far prevailed over the earth as to have effaced from the minds of men the vestiges of moral rectitude, and extinguished the spark of virtue. The most abandoned sinner is sometimes obliged to listen to the voice of reason and religion, which, in the interior of his soul, espouses the cause of truth, and forces him to respect what he has not the resolution to embrace. The countenance of the just man appears decked with heavenly charms, and extorts secret homage from the most flagitious: he resembles the ark of the Lord, the abode of his glory, which even among

the Philistins retains its terrors, and its majesty.

The more the worldling is enslaved to his passions, the more does he interiorly esteem the man who has fought and conquered them. The more rapidly he is borne down the impetuous torrent of pleasure, the more does he admire the magnanimity, and courage of the soul, which is capable of resisting its incessant, and, in his opinion, irresistible violence. From every shameful fall he collects an honourable testimony in favour of virtue; because, from the experience of his own weakness, he is more sensibly convinced of the strength of mind which it inspires. Hence the just man appears in his eyes infinitely more worthy of admiration, than all the great personages whom the world extols. He forms a comparison between the respective merits of both, and invariably gives the palm to the virtuous. He remarks that good fortune, or

even bold temerity may form conquerors; that birth, or chance may bestow crowns and sceptres; that men who are called great, may be indebted for that proud appellation, either to the peculiar circumstances of the age in which they lived, or to the caprice and adulations of the people; that honours, and dignities are not always the fruit of real merit: in a word, that genius, cultivated with labour and perseverance, may attain every degree of glory which the world can bestow: and moreover he remarks, that in all these various acquirements the soul inherited from nature the first dispositions, and, as it were, the outlines of that glory which was the object of her ambition, and which she attained. On the other hand, he reflects that piety is a merit to which the just man is entitled independently of every living creature; a merit pure and unadulterated; a merit, which is acquired by opposing the dispositions of nature,

and in the pursuit of which, he must necessarily encounter continual obstacles and repugnances in his own breast.—In this manner, even vice contributes to honour virtue, and darkness gives testimony to the light.

The esteem of the world, moreover, is not confined to silent admiration: it raises its voice; it publicly proclaims that the just man is happy; it envies his lot, and declares that he has chosen the better part. Ah! my friends, you perhaps have imagined that sinners, the slaves of their debauched inclinations, were incessantly inebriated with the fumes of sensuality, and worldly enjoyments: you perhaps have thought that the illusion continued without interruption, and that their whole life was a pleasant dream. But the case is far otherwise. For, even in the midst of their false pleasures, they secretly acknowledge that the happiness of the just man is far superior to their own; they com-

pare the peaceful serenity of his conscience with the ceaseless remorse to which they are the devoted prey; the sweet consolations which he enjoys in the paths of virtue, with the bitter ingredients which the world mixes in their cups of pleasure; the silent and undisturbed tranquillity of his retirement, with the continual hurry and anxiety of their hopes, and fears: his days full of good works, and devoted to the great business of salvation, with their days spent in the pursuit of pleasure, in doing nothing to the purpose, and in which few moments can be said to be devoted either to the glory of God, or the good of their fellow creatures. They make this comparison, even in the midst of their debaucheries, and the effect which it produces on their minds is painful indeed: it forces repeated sighs from their bosom; it displays before their eyes the melancholy state of their own soul, and exposes in

the most engaging charms the happy lot of the just.—Why then do you hesitate to declare yourselves the servants of Jesus Christ in the presence of sinners? Be not afraid: they will wish to resemble you, the instant you have ceased to resemble them.

Perhaps you have frequently sought after the applause of men, and with that view, have exhibited before them the full display of your talents. But have you ever succeeded in the attempt? No: the world looks down, I will not say with indifference, but with contempt and scorn on the person who avowedly courts its approbation and smiles. One beautiful woman will not flatter another; one vain man will not extol another. The world is not fond of bestowing praise on its own: it points out the weaknesses, and defects, and not the good qualities of its adorers; it seeks to depress, and not to exalt its votaries. But, if you embrace

a life of virtue, the world no longer considers you as its own, and, therefore, it will not seek to lessen your reputation; or rather it will not only allow you the highest degree of merit to which your piety is entitled, but will likewise extol, and magnify every other good quality which it had hitherto unjustly called in question. Depend upon it, therefore, that the world will not esteem the qualities on which you now pride yourselves, until you yourselves despise them for the love of Jesus.

Do this, and the world will soon exclaim: "how admirable it is to see a person of his age, or in his circumstances, renounce with a resolute mind the vanities, and follies of a sinful life." The minister of God indeed will not flatter you so far as to say that your merit will be equal to the applause which you will receive. For, were kings to throw their crowns and sceptres at thy feet, O God! what would

they renounce? Agreeable dreams, and real anxieties. What would they sacrifice? Nothing, when compared with the treasures with which Thou enrichest the faithful soul, and the glory which he will acquire in serving Thee. The world, however, incompetent as it is to judge of spiritual things, will admire, and extol the merit of this your sacrifice: and so far from having reason to dread its censures, you will be confused by its unmerited applause; you will exclaim against their adulations; you will treat them as injurious to the honour of God; and humbled into the dust at the sight of your own nothingness, of which you will then be more sensibly convinced, you will say: "what have I renounced, my God, for which Thou hast not repaid me a hundred fold!"

Great and glorious, indeed, is this homage which the world pays to piety. But this is not all; it not only

applauds, and envies the choice of the just man, but in his fidelity and rectitude alone does it seek, and find consolation. For the truth of this assertion I will appeal to your own experience. By whom were you comforted and supported in your afflictions, and distress, on those trying occasions, when you were either deserted by your former companions, or when their society was become insupportable? Was it not by the faithful, and pious friend? Was it not he, says St. Augustin, who poured oil on your wounds, who instilled into your troubled minds the soothing balm of resignation to the decrees of heaven, who alleviated your sorrows, and, by being admitted into the secret recesses of your heart, removed the heavy load by which it was oppressed? Have you not experienced that the man of virtue alone can share in the disgraces of a friend without coolness, and rejoice in his prosperity without envy?

Yes, my beloved, the afflicted worldling seeks consolation in the society of the just. There he breathes that air of candour, sincerity, and truth which he enjoys not in the world. Into their bosoms he pours forth the secret emotions of his heart, the inmost recesses of his soul. In their presence he beholds the folly of indulging melancholy and uneasiness on account of the vicissitudes of life, and candidly acknowledges that there is nothing in the world but vanity, and affliction of spirit. With them he is not restrained by the thought that perhaps he is confiding his secrets to a false friend. With them his heart dilates; he enjoys peace; he is free from suspicion, and mistrust; and he tastes the ineffable pleasure of displaying his whole soul without fear.

In this source the public honours, which the world pays to virtue, may be said peculiarly to originate. Frequently have we seen men of obscure

extraction, but ennobled by the gifts of grace, acquire greater esteem, and more honourable distinctions, than birth and dignity ever obtained. Servants of God, of the meanest origin according to the world, have been the arbiters of princes, and their people, and have, by the mere reputation of their sanctity, been received with greater homage and veneration than the most haughty vanity ever dared to aspire to. Anthony the hermit, a man who enjoyed no worldly distinction amongst his countrymen, was renowned through the whole universe; and Emperors themselves rejoiced more at receiving a letter from the man of God, than in wearing the diadem. Jehu, king of Israel, seated the holy man Jonadab in his own chariot at a pompous solemnity; and royal majesty did not blush to behold on his right hand the simplicity of a prophet. Daniel, one of the children of captivity, received

in the palace even of an infidel king, and in a nation where he was a slave, the honours of the purple robe and golden collar, which were the highest honours in the state. The most licentious court of Palestine publicly venerated the austerity of John the Baptist; and Herod endured with respect the bold reproofs of the precursor, until his weakness abandoned him to the lascivious cruelty of his adulterous consort. O man! why are you ashamed of piety? Piety alone, says the Spirit of God, will make you illustrious among the people, cause you to be honoured by the wise and the ancients, give you respectability even in the presence of kings, and what is more, will be the means of your attaining to life eternal, and of leaving behind you a renown that will last for ages to come, *Wisd.* viii. 10, 11, 13.

Be careful only that your piety be not stained with any weakness of hu-

man nature, and that the remnants of your former bad dispositions, passions, and defects, be entirely subdued: for these in general are the causes of the derisions and censures of the world. Do this, and then you will have nothing more to fear, than lest your first step towards a reformation of life should receive the applause which is due only to perfect repentance; lest the world should attempt to crown you before you have fought, and conquered; lest the misguided judgment of the public should throw a veil over the remnants of your former defects, and lest, by the repeated approbations bestowed on your feeble commencement in piety, you should be lulled into a false security, and should forget your past crimes; — crimes, which perhaps a whole life spent in weeping and penance would be inadequate to atone for. Here is your danger. Tremble, then, I say; for perhaps this undeserved

esteem of men may be a judgment of God upon you, awarding this empty recompense in consideration of some natural virtues that you possess, and reserving for hereafter the punishment which your concealed pride has deserved. The number of false penitents, who thus receive their reward in this life, is probably very great: and therefore, the greatest danger which threatens a Christian on his first entrance on a life of piety, is the too hasty applause of the world: for we are naturally inclined to over-rate our own exertions, and if the public should over-rate them likewise, we should be too ready to conclude that we had finished our career before we had completed the first step; and thus the world, which first seduced us by diminishing in our eyes the enormity of sin, would seduce us again by exaggerating our virtues.

Be therefore on your guard; pay no attention to man, or to the opinion of man, but perform all your actions as if God was your only witness; submit your cause to his decision, for he alone is just and true; and be resigned to the consequences which may result from the impression which your change may make on the world. If it be his will that your conduct should meet with the approbation and praise of men, he will, in the midst of these vain acclamations, infuse into your souls a more perfect knowledge of your weakness and dependence. Paul, at the time that a whole city, captivated with the lustre of his piety, proclaimed him a god, and were preparing their sacrifices; Paul, at the time that he was received by the faithful as an angel of the Most High; Paul, I say, in the midst of these accumulated honours, was humbled by the shameful sting of Satan: God, who alone was

the author of his exaltation, stampt upon his heart the humiliating evidence of his own weakness, lest he should attempt to exalt himself. But if, on the contrary, it be his will that derisions and censure be the portion of your virtue, he will amply compensate for these exterior trials by secret consolations; and he will oppose an insurmountable barrier to the combinations and efforts of a profane world. We are despised, said the Apostle, we are trodden under foot like dirt, but we are not dejected; we are treated as the outcast of the world, the offscouring of all even until now; but we rejoice in these tribulations, because we enjoy the ineffable consolations of Jesus, who never fails to administer the sweet balm of heavenly delights to his servants when they are suffering for his name.

Throw yourselves, therefore, into the arms of his love, and be not solicitous for the consequences. Begin at least

to serve him. Break asunder the chains, shake of the yoke, which have so long held you in bondage. Dare to despise the judgment of a world, the fallacy of whose pleasures you have experienced: and no longer insult the majesty of God, by fearing him less than man. Listen to the dictates of reason, and attribute not too great importance to the opinion of creatures; or rather, be not led away by the supposition that piety is always ridiculed and despised.

Do thou, O God, complete the work thou hast begun. Enlighten and support the steps, give strength to the timid and wavering resolutions of these thy servants, on their first entrance through the narrow gate. Convince them that thy judgments alone are to be feared; that the derisions and scoffs of the world add a new lustre and increased merit to the actions which are agreeable to thy divine Majesty;

and that the works of piety, which thy grace has enabled them to perform, can receive no competent reward, unless thou bestowest thyself.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

ON WORKS OF CHARITY TO OUR NEIGHBOUR.

Loving one another with brotherly love . . . communicating to the necessities of the saints; pursuing hospitality. . . . . Rom. xii. 10, 13.

ALTHOUGH the obligation of communicating to the necessities of our neighbours is so frequently inculcated in holy writ, and so universally known and acknowledged by Christians of every denomination, nevertheless, its extent is so little understood, and the means of making our charities subservient to salvation are so little attended to, that it is the duty of

the pastor to expose from time to time, before the eyes of the faithful, the precise maxims of the gospel on that subject.——Many there are with revenues more than ample to supply the utmost wants of nature, whose unfeeling or covetous dispositions induce them to believe that the precept is fulfilled to the extent required, by bestowing a few superfluities and a casual trifle on the poor. To these it is necessary to repeat the dreadful anathemas pronounced by the spirit of God against those who refuse to administer assistance and relief to their distressed fellow-members in proportion to their means.—— Others there are, who, because their worldly substance is small, and barely sufficient for the supply of their own necessities, imagine that they are totally exempted from the obligation of charity. To these it is necessary to state, that charity has many branches, and that as much, in proportion to their

means, is required from the poor as from the rich.

It is, moreover, incumbent on the pastor, not only to enlarge from time to time on the above subjects, but to display the motives on which charity ought to be founded. The merit of charity consists, not in the gift alone, but in the intention and disposition of the giver. The man who is charitable through pride, vain-glory, or through the mere natural sentiments of compassion, will be rejected by the Judge at the last day with these words: *Amen, thou hast received thy reward.* The man who loves his neighbour, and relieves his distresses, and at the same time continues obstinate in his wicked ways, will acquire no title to an eternal recompense.——Be attentive, whilst I enlarge on these manifold parts of charity.

1. It is an established maxim of religion, that every Christian is charged

with the care of his brother in affliction, and that the law, by commanding us to love him, imposes the obligation of succouring and relieving him in distress. This is a necessary deduction: for love cannot exist without a feeling and sympathy for the object beloved, nor consequently without endeavouring to remove the cause of his sufferings. The precept, therefore, of loving our neighbour, is something more than a command to refrain from injuring him either in his property, reputation, or person; it enforces the duty of protecting him against the malevolence of others, and of parting even with what is our own when his necessities require it:—it is something more than an interdiction of hatred, animosity, and revenge; it exacts from us the same sincerity of love towards him, as we feel for ourselves.

Works of charity, therefore, are not merely recommended as tending to

greater perfection, but they are imposed as an indispensable law on every Christian By the grace which united us in baptism to the assembly of the saints, we were all made members of the same body, and children of the same Father. We then contracted an intimate and sacred connection with every individual of the faithful. All distinctions between noble and peasant, rich and poor, were then done away. From that time the distresses and wants of others are become our own: when a fellow-member suffers, we are bound to suffer with him; nor can we refuse him our attention, our solicitude, and our services, without renouncing the sacred band by which we are all united together under Jesus Christ, and which is the only foundation of our hopes, and our only pledge of eternal glory. The first Christians possessed every thing in common; because, from the time of their conversion, they formed but one

heart and one soul. They sold all they had, and deposited the amount in the hands of the apostles, because they deemed it useless to be the legal owners of a property which was become the property of their brethren, and of which necessity alone could regulate the expenditure for their own use.

This duty of charity increases in proportion to the wealth of the possessor. The truth of this position I will demonstrate in a few words.—Prosperity, and abundance of earthly possessions, cannot make void the obligation of practising the frugality, the simplicity, and the self-denial enjoined by the gospel. In vain have we amassed, like the Israelites, more manna than our brethren, we can apply no more to our own use than what is prescribed by the law: *he that had much had nothing over*, 2 Cor. viii. 15. This will not admit of doubt; unless it can be proved that Jesus forbad luxury, dissipa-

tion, and pleasures to the poor and wretched only, the poverty of whose state would have rendered such a prohibition nugatory.

If, therefore, it be contrary to the rules of the gospel to devote wealth to the gratifying of the sensual appetite; if the rich man be obliged to carry his cross, to seek not his consolation in this world, and to deny himself continually, in the same manner as the poor man, to what purpose, I ask, has Providence heaped so large a portion of the goods of the earth on a few individuals? Was it that they might cherish their disorderly passions? But the scriptures declare, that we are no longer indebted to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.—Was it that they might support the pride of rank and birth? By no means: for our lives ought to be hidden with Christ in God.—Was it that their days might flow on in tranquillity and indolence? Certainly not:

for if we do not mourn; if we do not suffer and fight, we shall perish.—Was it in order to attach them more to the world? Far from it: for the Christian is not a citizen of this world, but of the world to come.—Was it that they might feast sumptuously every day? No: for the rich man in the gospel was condemned on that very account: and who shall walk in his footsteps and be favoured with a milder sentence? Flesh and blood shall not possess the kingdom of heaven: if you do not penance, you shall perish.—Was it that they might amass riches, and extend their possessions? Ah! what will it profit them, if they gain the whole world, and lose their own souls.—Enumerate all the advantages, according to the world, which prosperity affords, and you will find that almost all are in opposition to the law of God.

What, therefore, were the designs of God in heaping riches on individuals?

It was, that they might be the ministers of his Providence to those who suffer: it was that certain depositaries, secure alike from violence and fraud, might be provided for the widow and the orphan, in order that strength and life might be imparted to every member of the body, and that none might be in danger of perishing through want. These were the designs of Providence; and these designs must be fulfilled: *for to him who knoweth to do good,* says St. James, *and doth it not, it is sin. Wo to you rich . . . your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be for a testimony against you, and shall eat your flesh like fire. You have stored up to yourselves wrath against the day of wrath,* James v.

The precept of charity, therefore, is obligatory, in the first place, on the more wealthy members of the community, and this in proportion to their means. The obligation, however, is not

confined solely to them: the precept is general, and extends to all: every member is required to succour his fellow-member in distress. I will elucidate this point by observing, that charity does not exclusively consist in distributing alms, as the scriptures abundantly testify: but is divided into several branches, many of which may be performed as well by the lower as by the higher classes of society. To visit the sick, to comfort the afflicted, to pray for all, are acts of charity, from the performance of which no one is debarred, and from the obligation of which no one can be exempted.—You, therefore, amongst my present auditory, whose poverty will allow you only to bestow a little, let me exhort you to bestow that little willingly, like the poor widow in the gospel, *Luke* xxi. 2. The Lord will repay you. In addition to this, apply sedulously to the other branches of charity which are within

your power;—visit the sick,—comfort the afflicted,—fly to the bedside of your suffering fellow-member,—cheer his desponding spirits, and reconcile him to chastisements which are inflicted by a merciful God. In order to form a just estimate of these works of charity, suppose for a moment that you yourselves are laid on the bed of sickness, languishing under the pains of a mortal disease, and that the christian friend enters your apartment of sorrow; pours oil on your wounds; respects your loathsome flesh as the temple of the Holy Ghost; venerates you as the image of God; loves you as a brother—as a fellow-member—as a co-heir of eternal bliss; calms your impatience by the maxims of faith; and submits to every inconvenience, in order either to mitigate your sufferings, or promote your salvation. Would he not impart the most soothing consolation to your mind? Ah! you would

call this charity indeed. You would lift up your hands to heaven, and exclaim: "Lord, thou art rich in mercy: thou wilt never abandon them that put their trust in thee: thy eye is ever attentive to the necessities of thy creatures, and thou wilt not suffer them to be afflicted without consolation, or above their strength." This, perhaps, is the most eminent branch of charity, and is in the power of every one to perform. Let me exhort you, therefore, to be attentive to it, and consider it as a duty which you owe to your fellow-members.

I will now proceed to the motives by which you ought to be actuated, in order to be entitled to the reward which is prepared for the charitable Christian.

2. Exterior works of piety have no merit in the sight of God, except they tend to the sanctification of the inward man; for the kingdom of God is with-

in us, and the establishment of that kingdom is promoted only by works which contribute to the extinction of vice, and to the complete subjugation of the passions. — According to this maxim of religion, the works of charity, namely, the relieving our brethren by almsdeeds, the consoling, visiting, or attending them in their afflictions, are the promoters of piety, but they are not piety itself: they are the duties of a Christian, but they form not the whole of his character.—Charity, in order to be entitled to an eternal reward, must contribute to the increase and purification of our virtue; it must be the daily remedy for our imperfections, and every individual act must tend to the right ordering of some one or other of our passions. For this purpose we must look into the state of our souls, and examine, by the light of grace, the nature and the extent of our depraved inclinations. This done, we

must select those works of mercy which, by their opposite tendency, are calculated to effect our deliverance from their odious tyranny.—For instance, if our affections are centered in the world and its vanities, we must give the preference to those works which more frequently call us away from the noise and hurry of the world, and engage us in prayer, silence, and retirement. — If our disposition is passive and indolent, if we have not sufficient courage to stimulate ourselves to works of self-denial, and we lead a more sensual and effeminate life than what is usually led in the world, although perhaps disgust or other motives have induced us to live in retirement: ah! then the more laborious, the more painful works of mercy, attendance on the more disgusting, the more wretched objects of misery ought to be our choice.—If in the duties of religion we seek to distinguish ourselves from

others, and court the applause of the world, we must then prefer the more obscure works of mercy, and those in particular which are likely to expose us to the derisions of the unwise.— If our temper is hasty and vehement, and we are irritated and ruffled by every trifling contradiction or untoward event, then we must choose the works which require mildness, and patience in the performance, and be ready to endure with calmness the complaints, the discontents, the ingratitude, and even the abuse of those whom we relieve.— In a word, it must be our object to select the works which will the most effectually habituate us to the practice of those virtues to which we are strangers.

This, my beloved friends, is an important subject for your consideration. Exterior works, as I said above, have no merit except they promote our sanc-

tification: and our sanctification is not promoted but by the correction of our vices. The new man is formed in our souls in proportion only as the old man, the man of sin, is destroyed. Those works only augment the life of the spirit, which mortify the inclinations of the flesh: those works only give additional strength to the inspirations of grace, which weaken our unlawful propensities. In the life of a Christian, almost every action ought to be a sacrifice; for the Christian lives by faith, and every action that is performed through motives of faith, must, of its own nature, be painful to flesh and blood, because it is necessarily in opposition to the dictates of the sensual man. ——In this manner works of mercy ought to be made the daily sacrifice of the faithful Christian: the apostle distinguishes them by that name; *for by such sacrifices*, says he, exhort-

ing the faithful to the pious offices of charity, *by such sacrifices, God's favour is obtained,* Heb. xiii. 16.

We violate this maxim of religion two different ways. In the first place, having received from nature a tender and feeling heart, which is easily affected at the sight of others woes, we are charitable merely through sentiments of human compassion; on some occasions we are charitable through gratitude; on others, through friendship; and on all, through motives which are agreeable to our taste and inclination.

I readily allow, that the man who is charitable through these motives, fulfils a moral and social duty; and therefore, I pretend not to say, either that these happy dispositions ought to be resisted, or that no merit is acquired *merely* because they are in unison with our natural feelings. No, my

beloved brethren; it is the duty of religion to make the gifts of nature subservient to grace. These natural dispositions to virtue are gifts of the Creator, which, according to the designs of his Providence, ought to be made the first foundations of our spiritual edifice. But we must reflect that piety is not confined within the limits of nature: that it extends far beyond them; and that, if we stop at these boundaries, we have done nothing, we are only at the entrance of the narrow gate, where the path is rugged, and strewed with thorns. Ah! however happy our dispositions may be, we shall never advance far, if we only comply with their dictates, without any reference to the conquering of our vices and passions. This, therefore, is the rule which we ought to bear in mind, namely, that the exterior works of piety, which leave us as sensual, as unmortified, as

imperfect as we were before, have only the appearance, and not the substance of the virtue of charity.

In the second place, this maxim is violated in a more culpable manner.—There are many who lead a worldly, sensual, and profane life, and rely with unsuspecting security on their works of mercy, and on the abundance of their alms. Like the daughters of Tyre, they expect to appease the wrath of the great King by mingling charity with their worldly pleasures. They imagine that charity covers all; that prayer, retirement, self-denial, and the other most indispensable maxims of a christian life may be neglected, and their sins atoned for by largesses to the poor. But, my God! how light would then be thy cross! how favourable to riches and sensuality would then be thy doctrine! and how very open and easy the path that leads to life! Ah! the Lord demands not our

gold alone, but our hearts. Charity, it is true, contributes to the expiation of the sins of which we repent; but it does not justify the passions which we continue to indulge: it is the fruit of piety; but it is not the licence for vice. ——My God! give me a compassionate and tender heart, but suffer not my eyes to be shut to my multiplied transgressions. Infuse the holy spirit of charity into my breast, but suffer not the artful delusions of Satan to lead me into that fatal error, that alms exempt from penance, lest my good works contribute more to my condemnation, than to the accumulation of a never-failing treasure in heaven.

Moreover, our title to a reward hereafter is forfeited, as often as we are not actuated in the distribution of our charities by a proper intention. On this subject, however, I shall only say, that we must have no ostentatious views, but be more desirous that our

charities should be concealed from the eyes of the public, than that they should be the subjects of admiration and applause: we must be willing that even our left hand be ignorant of what our right hand doeth. The love of God, and the desire of accomplishing his blessed will alone must be our motive: we must respect a brother in distress, as being a fellow-member of the same body; and we must relieve him with the same love and good will, as if Jesus Christ in person pleaded his cause before us.

Good God! exclaims St. Augustin, how many good works, on which we confidently rely here below, will be rejected when the Lord Jesus shall come to judge justice! how many fruits of charity, with which we expect to be enriched for eternity, will be found corroded by the worm of pride and vain glory! how little will be left in our hands, after the Judge has sepa-

rated the good from the bad, the works of nature from the works of grace! and how will our supposed treasure melt away, when he shall allot an eternal reward to those only which were performed through pure motives of love, and with the sole desire of pleasing Him!

Let us meditate on these truths, my beloved brethren, whilst we have time. This is our day: let us work before the night overtakes us.——The conditions which I have described are numerous, I allow: but they are not calculated to deter you from exerting your whole strength in the cause of God and of your souls: on the contrary, they are consoling—they are encouraging—they are easy. I will enumerate them one by one, and appeal to your own decision for the truth of what I assert.—In the first place, I informed you that the exercise of charity is a duty; that it is imposed on you,

not as a matter of counsel, but as an absolute and indispensable command. What more persuasive argument than this could I have employed, in order to make it appear amiable in your eyes? Will its charms be diminished, because it is imposed as a duty by Him who made you? Will it be less pleasing to the disciple, because it is more pleasing to the master?—Secondly, I declare that these works of mercy ought to be made the daily sacrifices for the faults which you daily commit. My friends, what could be more consoling than to be informed of a new source of merit in these pious duties? to be directed to hidden treasures, which the greater number of Christians never expected to discover in them? What could be more desirable, than to learn that you may acquire, by the means of charity, every virtue which you have not hitherto possessed: that you may apply it as a remedy to all your evils; that you

may obtain by its means patience, purity, mildness, love of prayer, and, if you please, love even of retirement; and that in this single duty of religion, you may reap the fruits of all the rest?——Lastly, I declared that your acts of charity must be performed as if God alone were your witness; and that the applauses and censures of men must be totally disregarded. Is this declaration calculated to diminish the charitable dispositions of your breasts? What are all mankind, when compared with God, that the faithful soul should be influenced by them? Shall the esteem of a world, which she despises, which she has renounced, appear in her eyes a sufficient reward for actions which will be crowned with eternal glory? Is there danger of weakening her charity, if I inform her that the whole world is not worthy of her, that God alone deserves to be the witness of actions which he alone can reward?

and that, in order to secure their just recompense, it is necessary that she seek no other glory than that which will never end?

No, my dearly beloved, the spirit of the law does not operate against the fulfilling of the law. On the contrary, the more we advance in piety, the more will our charity increase: the more we are acquainted with the law of love, the more vehemently shall we aspire after its perfection in our souls. Error is unmasked, in proportion as it is examined: but truth appears in greater splendor, the clearer it is seen. Thus, when we behold it in its true colours hereafter, we shall love it with fervour, with sincerity, and with constancy.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

ON A FUTURE STATE.

The children of the kingdom shall be cast out into the exterior darkness; there shall be weeping, and gnashing of teeth. . . . . . Matt. viii. 12.

THIS, dear Christians, is the term of all the desires, hopes, counsels, and enterprises of the wicked. Here shall end the vain reflections of the wise, the doubts and incertitude of unbelievers, the mighty projects of conquerors, the monuments of human glory, the solicitudes of ambition, the distinctions of talents, and the pride of man. This life, there-

fore, is a fleeting moment, the prelude only of an eternal futurity. Exterior darkness, or inaccessible light, will be the apportioned lot of all.

Unhappily, a spirit of irreligion and incredulity, has, in these times, spread its baneful influence over the christian world. The reality of a future state is called in question by many, and the evil continues to increase. It is not, indeed, surprising that dissolute men, in order to silence the voice of conscience in the midst of their unlawful pleasures, should endeavour to raise doubts on this subject. A miserable eternity is a dreadful thought: it throws a gloom over all the enjoyments of the world; for which reason the devil has at all times endeavoured to efface the idea from the minds of his followers. The belief of a future state of punishments and rewards is a galling check on the passions, and therefore he is sensible that he can never succeed in

forming hardened sinners, till he has first made them unbelievers.

In this discourse I will prove the weakness of the arguments on which infidelity is founded. I will prove that the wicked will survive their abominations, and that death, which puts an end to their crimes, will not close their existence. I will in the first place prove the *certainty* of a future state from the pure light of reason; and secondly, the *necessity*, from the greatness and justice of God, and the universal consent of all ages and nations. Not that I suppose that any individual in this assembly is tainted with this fatal error; but my object is, to shew you the strong foundations on which your faith is built, to excite you to raise your thoughts to heaven, the happy mansion to which you are invited, and to supply you with proper arguments if chance should lead you into the company of unbelievers.

1. The pretended *uncertainty* of a world to come is the basis on which the security of unbelievers is founded. "We know not what or where this other world is," they observe: "perhaps there is nothing beyond the grave: let us therefore enjoy the present moment, and leave to chance a futurity, which either does not exist, or which, at least, we are not permitted to explore."

If we examine the origin of this pernicious error, we shall immediately discover that interest, and passion, and not the love of truth, was the source from which it sprung. The unbeliever inherited the same principles of natural religion as the rest of mankind: he found written in his heart a law which forbad violence, injustice, and perfidy: an interior monitor whispered in his soul that he should not do to others what he would not that others should do to him. Education strengthened

these principles of nature; he was taught to know, to love, and to serve the author of his existence: instruction made him acquainted with the rules of virtue, and example excited him to follow them.

The unbeliever, therefore, at his entrance into life adored the Supreme Being like the rest of men: he respected his laws, he feared his judgments, he hoped for the promises. How comes it then, that he now rejects God, that he considers hell only as a fable, futurity as a dream, the soul as a spark which is extinguished with the body? By what means has he made this wonderful discovery? Was it by deep and protracted meditation? Did he assist the efforts of his own weak reason by consulting the learned and the unprejudiced? Did he purify his heart, in order to counteract the influence of his passions? In an affair of such consequence, the greatest circum-

spection, the most mature reflections were undoubtedly necessary.

No, he did nothing of all this. The pretended discovery owes its origin to far different causes. The truths of religion began to appear doubtful, in proportion as his morals were corrupted: then only he wished to be convinced that man was like the beasts of the field, when he had brutalized the faculties of his soul: impiety gained admittance by shutting every avenue to truth; and incredulity gained his affections, when he perceived that it alone could deaden the stings of conscience, and enable him to give loose to the most infamous passions without restraint. By these means he acquired the sublime knowledge of infidelity; by these great efforts he discovered a truth which had been concealed from, or, more properly, held in detestation by the rest of men.

Yes; my beloved friends, corrup-

tion of the heart was the source from whence this fatal error took its rise. Shew me, if you can, a prudent, chaste, disinterested, and temperate man, who disbelieves in God, who expects not a future state, and who considers impurities and abominations as the bias and sport of innocent nature. If such a man exists, he either indulges his passions in private, and is exteriorly virtuous, in order to give authority to his impious tenets; or he indulged them formerly, and now, satiated with their excesses, throws himself into the arms of temperance, as the only source of pure enjoyment. Debauchery was the first origin of infidelity; his heart was corrupted before his faith was lost: self-interest induced him to believe that his soul was mortal: and the cause of his present moral deportment arises solely from the disgust occasioned by the reiterated gratification of the sensual appetite.

Let us, however, proceed to the rea-

sons on which the basis of infidelity is founded. You will allow that no one should renounce a belief of such serious consequence as is that of eternity, on slight and trivial grounds; neither should any one abandon the universal opinion of mankind, the religion of all ages, unless urged to it by the evidence of truth. Now what are his reasons? "We know not," he says, "what or where this other world is: perhaps there is nothing beyond the grave." ——These are the insurmountable reasons which the Deist opposes to the faith of the whole universe. O man! reflect for a moment. A single doubt is sufficient to make you an infidel, and all the well-supported proofs of religion are insufficient to make you a believer. The only foundation of your opinion is incertitude; and you call religion, although standing on the firmest basis, an imposition on the credulity of the multitude. But let us examine which

of the two, the infidel or the Christian, is most open to this reproach of credulity. The Christian's belief of a future state is founded on the authority of the scriptures;—a book beyond contradiction the most deserving of credit; on the deposition of apostolic men, who have shed their blood in defence of the truth, and to whose doctrine the conversion of the most enlightened part of the world has given testimony;—on the accomplishment of prophecies, a character of truth which impiety cannot counterfeit;—on the tradition of all ages, of all nations, of all people. The infidel, on the other hand, gives credit to a doctrine which is supported by nothing more than a simple doubt, a mere suspicion. "Who has seen it?" he says, "We know not where it is." Credulity, therefore, is a reproach which attaches to the infidel alone.

But supposing that the reasons for and against the belief of a futurity

were equal, nevertheless, even in this case, I say, the infidel ought to admire, and wish that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul were true; a doctrine which confers such honour on man; a doctrine which teaches him that his origin is heavenly, his hopes eternal. He ought likewise to abhor the system of infidelity, than which nothing can be more humiliating to man: a system which reduces him to a level with the brute creation, which gives him neither end, destination, nor hope; and which confines his existence to a small number of fleeting, restless, painful days on earth. Supposing, therefore, that equal reasons existed on both sides, an elevated mind ought to prefer the more honourable doctrine: prudence demands this choice. What name, then, shall we affix on the infidel, who having trivial doubts only on his side, and beholding religion supported by authority, prophecy, miracles, examples,

prescription, reason, refuses his assent, and chooses rather to consider death as the close of existence, to leave his eternal lot in the hands of chance, and to expose himself deliberately and tranquilly to the most dreadful consequences, namely, to a miserable eternity. My God! is such a man guided by an unbiassed and enlightened reason, or rather is he not hurried on by the dictates of the most hopeless despair.

We will proceed to more cogent reasons. If it be true, that man has nothing to expect after this life; and if it be true, that the earth is his only seat of enjoyment, why is he not happy? Why do not his days, like those of the brute, flow on without disgust, without sorrow, in the enjoyment of flesh and blood? Why is he not satisfied with pleasures? Why cannot unrestrained gratifications fill the vast capacity of his heart? Why is there always some-

thing wanting? All other animals are happy in the station in which God has placed them: they joyfully inhabit the woods and fields, without envying the lot of man, whose means of enjoyment are infinitely superior. Man alone pants after more than this earth can afford: man alone is a prey to his restless desires, tormented by his fears, and sorrowful in the midst of pleasures.

And what, O man, is the reason of this? The reason is manifest: we were not made for the earth; we were made for a more happy state: our souls are susceptible of greater enjoyments than the whole world can produce, and nothing less than God can ever satisfy us.

2. In the second place, if all ended with the body, by what means could men of every age and clime have conceived the idea of the immortality of the soul? If man were formed, like the brute, for the earth alone, nothing

could be more incomprehensible to him than the idea of immortality. Nevertheless, this so extraordinary an idea, so contradictory to the senses, since man dies, and is forgotten like the brutes, is established over the whole earth. Savage states, indeed, have been found who live without a mode of worship, but they all expect a futurity, they all figure to themselves a happy region, which their souls will inhabit after death. Now let me ask, by what means could men of such different climes, sentiments, and interests, agree in this one point, and all declare themselves immortal? It was not by collusion; for no communication existed between them. It was not by education; for manners, customs, and habits are not the same in all. The fact is, that man convinced himself of this truth; or rather, nature taught him. This is a sentiment infixed in his soul by the Author of his existence,

and has continued indelible from the beginning of time.

The origin, therefore, of infidelity, and the reasons on which it is founded, are weak and trivial. We will examine the plausibility which they attempt to throw over it, and you shall see that the system, so far from being plausible, is equally repugnant to the idea of an all-wise God, and to the testimony of our conscience.

3. "Is it becoming the majesty of God," they say, "to trouble himself about what passes in the world, to count the virtues or vices of us poor worms of the earth? This would be an occupation which even man would disdain."

Before I expose the impiety of this horrid blasphemy, I must remark, that the greatest indignity to the Supreme Being is offered by the unbeliever himself. For he supposes that the Deity must endure cares, solicitudes, and a studied attention. This is not the case;

for as we live, move, and exist in him, every thought and every action of every individual is instantly registered in his eternal mind, and can no more escape his notice, than he can cease to be God.

This truth being acknowledged, I answer in the first place, that if it be beneath the majesty of God to reward the virtues or punish the vices of us poor worms of the earth, the man who was just, upright, chaste, and pious, would not be more acceptable in his sight than the man who was profane, impure, deceitful, and impious; since the one and the other would share the same fate, and be buried for ever together in the tomb.

This, however, is a small part of the consequences attendant on this blasphemous system. God, so far from looking down with indifference on virtue and vice, would declare himself in favour of the impious. For, him he

exalts like the cedars of Lebanon, him he crowns with riches and honours. On the other hand, he seems to forget the just man, he humbles him, he chastises him, he delivers him up to the will and power of his enemies; for sufferings and contempt are generally the lot of the virtuous on earth. If, therefore, no rewards be in store for virtue, no punishments for vice, in a future state, the Divinity is the protector of adulterers, blasphemers, and of wickedness in the most abominable shapes; he is the persecutor of innocence, of purity and virtue; his favours attend vice, and his frowns lower over sanctity. Ah! dearly beloved, what a God of darkness, confusion, and iniquity is created by this system of infidelity!

"Since this God is so just, then," the infidel will say, "how can he punish as crimes those inclinations for pleasures which he himself has implanted in our nature?" To many, perhaps,

this argument may appear specious; but a slight examination will be sufficient to prove its fallacy. According to this argument, desire is our own only natural law; inclination is our only rule of conduct. We have only to cast an envious eye on the property of our neighbour, and, strictly speaking, it will be lawful to wrest it from him: we have only to look on his wife with a corrupted heart, and it will not be criminal to violate the sanctity of matrimony, notwithstanding the most sacred rights of society and nature: in a word, we have only to possess inclinations for every vice, and we may indulge them without remorse; and as no one is free from vicious inclinations, no one is debarred from this impious liberty. Oh! how revolting to reason is this doctrine.

But turn to the other side of the question, and do justice to the nature of man, or rather to the Creator who

formed him. If the law of our members impel us to sensual enjoyments, we find another law written in our hearts, which invites us to chastity and temperance. Of these two opposite laws, why should the unbeliever decide, that the one which favours the senses is the most conformable to the nature of man? If, indeed, no one could be found who lived in opposition to this law, he might with some reason argue from its violence, and irresistible influence; but there have always been, and there still exist a multitude of chaste and faithful souls, who live in the fear of the Lord, and in the observance of his holy laws. These inherited from nature the same inclinations as the rest of men; the objects of passion are as capable of making an impression on them, as on others; they resist them nevertheless, and so far from lessening their happiness by their resistance, they increase it an hundred fold. The grati-

fication of our passions, therefore, is opposite, rather than conformable to our nature.

Hence we must conclude, that it is just on the part of God to punish the transgressors of his law. Here, again, the infidel will say, that "if there be a future state, it will be only for the just; that they perhaps may rise to a life immortal, but that the punishment of the sinner will be, the eternal annihilation of his soul." This is his last resource.

But in vain does he fly to this insecure hold: for what punishment would it be to the sinner to exist no more after death? He desires annihilation. It is his fondest hope. He lives peaceable in the midst of sensual pleasures, in the agreeable expectation of it. And can it be supposed that a just God will punish the sinner by granting him an end conformable to his desires? No: my beloved, God punishes not in this

manner. For where would be the punishment? It would not be the loss of the enjoyment of God; for the infidel neither loves him, nor wishes to enjoy him. It would not be annihilation; for nothing could be more desirable to the wretch, who knows that, after death, he shall exist only to suffer, and to expiate the abominations of his past life. It would not be the loss of the pleasures of the world, and of the dear objects of his passions; for he knows, that when he is no more, he can love them no longer. In fact, a more desirable lot could not be devised for the impious: and shall this be the sweet term of all his debaucheries, his blasphemies, and crimes?

No, beloved Christians, no: the hopes of the wicked shall perish, but their crimes shall not perish. Their torments shall be as eternal as their unlawful pleasures would have been, had they been masters of their own destiny.

The just Judge, who scrutinizes the heart, will proportionate their sufferings to their offences; immortal flames, to pleasures which they would willingly have immortalized: eternity itself will be their only just compensation, their only equitable punishment.

Oh, my friends! let us fly from this chaos of confusion, folly, and madness. Let us entertain a salutary fear of futurity. Do not ask what is done in this other world, but ask yourselves what you are to do in this. Remove the stings of conscience by the innocence of your lives: call in God to your assistance: seek happiness, not in shaking off the yoke of piety, but in tasting how sweet it is. Futurity will never appear to you incredible, if you live not like those unhappy men, who confine all their hopes to the enjoyments of the present life. Then, so far from dreading a world to come, you will long for its approach: you will sigh

for that happy hour, when the Son of Man, the Father of the world to come, shall punish the unbelievers, and admit into his kingdom the chosen few, who have lived in the expectation of a happy immortality.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

ON SUBMISSION TO THE WILL OF GOD.

Behold a great tempest arose in the sea, so that the ship was covered with the waves — and his disciples came to Jesus, and awaked him saying, Lord save us—and he said, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith.—Matt. viii. 24.

THE conduct of the disciples, as described in this day's gospel, conveys a most instructive lesson to Christians in adversity. They were in the midst of a boisterous sea, they had recourse to Jesus in their danger, and nevertheless they are rebuked as men of

little faith. They are rebuked, not indeed on account of their application to Jesus, but on account of the fear they felt on that occasion. They seemed to forget that God was the author of their present distress, and manifested by their alarms a want of submission to his holy will.

We, like the Apostles, are in the midst of a boisterous ocean, and frequently overwhelmed with the waves of tribulation and sufferings. On those occasions it is our duty, not only to fly to Jesus for assistance, but, in order to avoid the rebuke which the Apostles received, to shew no symptoms of alarm or despondency, to consider God as the great author of all that happens to us, and to be entirely submissive to his will. Ah! were this our disposition, what happy effects would it produce in our souls: it would create cheerfulness in adversity, give merit to our sufferings, sanctify our

amusements, moderate our fears, and regulate our hopes. It would impart happiness and content to each one in the state in which God has placed him, and, in opposition to every obstacle, enable him to apply every circumstance in life to his own sanctification.

Seldom however is this submission to the will of God to be found among Christians. All are unhappy; all are grieving; all are repining; all seem to think that this constant vicissitude of human things is occasioned, either by chance, by their own imprudence, or by the malice of others: none attribute them to the decrees of the great Ruler of the Universe. As this subject relates to the happiness of, perhaps, every individual of this assembly, I will enlarge upon it in this discourse.

The sorrows and disquietudes which are felt from time to time by almost every individual of the human race, arise from three different sources,

namely, anxiety for the future, dissatisfaction during the present moment, and useless regrets for the past. The future creates uneasiness by the fears and hopes which it excites; the present disturbs the mind by the disappointments, and cares which attend it; and the past throws a gloom over the soul, by representing to the imagination the sorrowful remembrance of past evils, which time ought to have obliterated.

1. Anxiety respecting the future, is, in general, the most bitter alloy of human happiness. Men are wretched, because they will not enjoy the present moment. They anticipate cares and troubles: they dive into the secrets of futurity for causes of uneasiness: they form imaginary phantoms, and frighten themselves with them: not reflecting that they have real grievances in abundance, they trouble themselves about to-morrow; they at-

tend not to the sentence of our Saviour, who says, that, *sufficient for the day is the evil thereof*, (Matt. vi. 34.) The more enlightened class of men form to themselves more subjects of uneasiness, than the illiterate; the wise are more timid and restless than the simple; and the greater their foresight the sooner do they descry future evils.

But, dear Christians, the man who throws himself without reserve into the hands of God, by perfect submission to his holy will, is a stranger to the troubles, the cares, and solicitudes of the children of the world. He knows that the secrets of futurity are concealed in the bosom of his Providence; and that the power of man can no more change the order of his adorable will, than it can add to his own stature. He is convinced that no danger is incurred by confiding wholly in the power and goodness of his Protector: or rather, he rejoices, he exults in the assurance

that God vouchsafes to interest himself in his behalf: his joy and peace of mind are increased, when the sacred oracles announce that the Lord expressly commands him to trust in his Providence, that He takes on himself the care of the future, and orders him to be solicitous only to sanctify the present by the works of piety, and religion.

I pretend not to insinuate that religion authorizes sloth and imprudence; and that dependance on God consists in placing such an unlimited confidence in him, as to suppose that he will provide for our future wants without our concurrence. This is by no means the case: the just man trusts in God, but he does not tempt him: he labours as if every thing depended on himself, but he awaits the issue of his exertions with placid tranquillity: he knows that his reason must suggest the necessary precautions, but he knows

likewise that success depends on God alone: he is discriminating in the choice of means, but he is simple, and submissive in the expectation of the event: in a word, he is as familiar with a prudent forecast as the worldling, but with this difference, that he never sacrifices his peace, and tranquillity of mind.

I should be more correct, if I asserted that the just man alone was truly provident, and that the prudence of the worldling was purely nominal. This I will prove by comparing the beautiful description, given by St. James, (*James* iii. 17.) of a Christian, and submissive prudence, with a prudence which is merely human.

First, the prudence of the just man, according to the Apostle, is chaste, and innocent. He acknowledges no other means of attaining his ends, than what conscience allows, and religion approves: every species of prudence

incompatible with salvation, is, according to him, the height of folly.—The prudence of the sinner, on the other hand, is corrupt, and criminal: he betrays his conscience in order to attain his ends: he considers only what will be advantageous; and he soon persuades himself that it is innocent.

Secondly, the prudence of the just man is placid. His measures are always calm, and mild, because they are subjected to the will of God: he wishes for success inasmuch only as it will be conformable to the will of heaven.—The prudence of the sinner, on the other hand, is turbulent, because he is not resigned to the will of God: he attaches happiness, not to the will of heaven, but to the success of his plans; and thus, his prudence becomes the fruitful source of solicitude, and anxiety.

Thirdly, the prudence of the just man is modest. He has no views be-

yond his state of life: he fixes proper limits to his desires: his ambition is to make himself useful: and thus his moderation is a treasure from whence the sweets of peace, and the security of innocence are derived.—The prudence of the sinner, on the other hand, is insatiable. He is always forming new projects: his desires know no bounds: the ill success of his measures is the only subject of his fears: and the risking of his salvation is of little consequence, provided he can attain the object of his pursuit.

Fourthly, the prudence of the just man is humble, and docile. He always mistrusts his own powers: he relies more on the assistance of heaven, than on all the precautions of human foresight: and although he neglects nothing on his part, he looks to God alone for success. —The prudence of the sinner, on the other hand, is full of self-sufficiency. He relies on his

own means for success: he confides in his own wisdom: he considers only his own strength, as if the great Disposer of all did not interfere with the things of this world.

Fifthly, the prudence of the just man is simple, and without guile. He places not his security in the constant mistrust of his fellow-creatures: he is not disposed to believe evil: he would rather be the victim of the designs of a few, than judge rashly of the thoughts and intentions of many.—The prudence of the sinner, on the other hand, is directed by suspicions, and mistrust. He places confidence in none: he suspects evil where it does not exist: he imagines that every individual, like himself, is solely intent on his own interest; and therefore, for his own security, as he thinks, he judges ill of all indiscriminately.

Sixthly, the prudence of the just man is without dissimulation. He has not re-

course to artifice: he wishes to deceive no one, and therefore he never disguises his real sentiments: his whole attention is devoted to sincerity, and candour.—The prudence of the sinner, on the other hand, is a continued duplicity. His lips belie his heart: his countenance is the reverse of his sentiments: he considers himself artful, in proportion as he is crafty: his whole life is a tissue of hypocrisy and deceit. His prudence, therefore, is always attended with uneasiness, and restraint, because he can never appear in his true character.

Lastly, the prudence of the just man is pious, and compassionate. To human means he adds the practice of virtue, and the advantages of prayer: his hopes of success are grounded on the abundance of his alms, and on the merits of christian charity: he discovers in the duties of religion, the principal resource, and only support of

his property.—The sinner, on the other hand, considers piety as an obstacle to his prosperity: he rejects the maxims of religion as incompatible with his worldly prospects: and, if at any time he puts on the appearance of virtue, it is merely external, in order to attain more easily some favourite object which he has in view.

Thus, continues the Apostle from whom I have taken the heads of this description, the prudence of the just man is a never failing source of peace springing up in his soul. Whereas, the prudence of the world, the prudence which cometh not from heaven, but from the corruption of the sinner, is an uninterrupted torrent of fears, of desires, and of disappointments.

2. The unhappiness of the sinner is occasioned, in the second place, by the pretended evils which prevent his enjoyment of the present time. Could he enjoy the present moment all would be

well; but generally his affections are fixed on things which he does not possess; and his mind is ruffled by every trivial circumstance that thwarts his inclinations. If he has one cause to rejoice, he has others to mourn. If prosperity smile upon him, health is wanting; if he be in health, prosperity refuses its smiles: if health and prosperity be united, the loss of a friend, disappointments, or anxieties prevent the enjoyment of either: if he possess every means of gratifying his inclinations, and no serious cause of uneasiness intervene, still he is not happy, still there is always something wanting; and so unfortunate is he in point of temper and disposition, that a trivial, or even an imaginary grievance will throw a gloom over a thousand objects of pleasure, and prevent the enjoyment of all that he possesses.

How preferable, even in a worldly sense, is the state of the true Chris-

tian! To him, even in the most trying circumstances, submission to the will of God is an abundant source of consolation. "God is sufficiently powerful," he says, "to support me. It is my duty to allow him to act as he pleases: he has abundant means of satisfying all my wants; and although things may appear desperate in the eyes of men, his power can easily redress them: it is his will that I should hope even when there seems to be no room for hope; for, in proportion as human assistance fails, he will be my protector."

Another motive for this humble and devout submission on the part of the just man, is the knowledge that he subjects himself to the will of a God who is infinitely wise; of a God who has the best motives for every affliction which he sends; who beholds the advantages of the different situations in which he places him; who does no-

thing by chance; and who knows the effects before he adopts the means. If we decided for ourselves, we might reasonably indulge uneasiness, for we are not sufficiently acquainted with our nature to know what would be best for us. But God regulates events with consummate wisdom, and although his motives are concealed, they are just and adorable. "I ought not," says the true Christian, "to scrutinize his unsearchable ways, with the weak, and confined powers of human understanding. I know not where the road will lead to, in which he has commanded me to walk; but since he has placed me in it, I will walk on cheerfully, and without fear: he frequently leads his faithful servant to the promised land through the dry, and fatiguing paths of the desert; and generally conceals his motives, in order that he may reap the whole merit of submission."

He reflects, moreover, that he sub-

jects himself to the will of a tender, and merciful God, who loves him, and who has his salvation only in view. If he chastises him, he knows that it is for his salvation; if he spares him, it is for his salvation; if he humbles him, it is for his salvation; if he exalts him, it is likewise for the same beneficent purpose: in a word, in whatever situation he may be, he knows that he leads him as a tender father; directs him as a friend; upholds him as a protector; and walks before him as a guide to direct him in all his ways. He knows that he is a God, whose dispensations to his creatures are directed solely by the dictates of mercy, and goodness; that he is a Father, who has no other object but the welfare of his child; and that he is a friend, who has nothing so much at heart as the interest of him whom he loves. This is honour:—this is happiness:—Can any condition

on earth be more desirable? Ah! if this were the only benefit which piety conferred, the lot of the just, and faithful soul is certainly the most rational, and happy that any one can wish for in this world.

3. The third source of the unhappiness of man is regret for the past. We are too apt to look back on the misfortunes of our past life with sorrow. Had we acted otherwise, we think, we should have avoided all the evils which embitter our days; or had we seized the advantages which were thrown in our way, we should now be comfortable, and happy. The grand science, however, of religion, is to take advantage of the past by contemplating the designs of God over the ways of men. The ancient patriarchs beheld the hand of God in every occurrence; they meditated on the various paths by which his wisdom conducted them through life; and were lost in astonish-

ment at the thought of his inscrutable ways. The sacred historians, likewise, had the Deity only in view. They represent God as the great Disposer of every event; and by them we are taught to consider the various revolutions which have agitated the universe, as the history of the designs and intentions of God upon men. With the same eye the just man looks back on the history of his past life. He sees no cause to lament any misfortune or loss, however serious or afflicting the consequences may be; because he knows that all was directed by the will of an all-wise, and merciful Providence. He cannot indeed discover the motives of God, but it is his consolation to reflect, that hereafter he will behold without disguise the adorable ways of providence in the regulation of every circumstance of his life, and admire the wisdom, and goodness, with which he made every thing contribute to his sanctification.

These are the benefits which the just man derives from submission to the will of God. Ah! my friends, turn yourselves to what side you please, you will never find rest and peace except in submission. You must will what God wills. This is the great secret of christian piety; this is the precious treasure of religion; this is the sublime science of the saints. Without this, what is man? He is the sport both of his turbulent passions, and of the perpetual vicissitudes of human things. Chained by the corruption of his heart to present enjoyments, with them he is hurried on with rapidity, and like the figures fixed on a wheel which are carried round when it is put in motion, he has never an assured permanence. He incessantly wishes to be united to creatures, and is incessantly obliged to tear himself from them. He is always supposing that he has attained the place of rest, and is

continually obliged to recommence his pursuit. He is always weary with his toils, and always drawn again into the vortex. In the midst of these his sorrows and regrets he finds no source of consolation; not in the world, for the world is the great cause of all his evils;—not in the testimonies of conscience, for this is the seat of remorse; not in the love of God, for against him he has revolted. He drinks the bitter chalice even to the dregs. In vain does he pour it from one cup into another, says the prophet; that is, in vain does he seek for pleasure by substituting one passion for another: anxiety, remorse, and bitterness pursue him still in every direction: he changes his situation, but he does not diminish his sufferings. *He hath poured it out from this to that,* says the royal prophet, *but the dregs thereof are not emptied; all the sinners of the earth shall drink!* (Ps. lxxiv. 9.)

Great God! why shall not my soul be subjected to thee? Art Thou such a hard master that there would be danger in leaving my concerns in thy hands? What have I to fear, if I place my whole dependance on Thee? Ah! when I attempted to be myself the director of my affairs, I always failed; the event never corresponded with my wishes, and endeavours: I succeeded only in forming to myself new anxieties, and disappointments. Thou didst take a pleasure in destroying the building as fast as I erected it: Thou wouldst teach me, that man endeavours in vain to build the house, unless thy adorable hand support, and raise it. How much more secure is it, my God, to suffer Thee alone to act, and to labour only under thy orders. What disquietudes should I have avoided, if I had been attentive to this duty! My condition in life would be the same, but my sufferings would not

have been the same. I should have enjoyed that peace, to which I have hitherto been a stranger, and hereafter, that recompense which Thou hast promised to those, who on earth desire only the accomplishment of thy will.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

ON SALVATION.

All whatsoever you do in word, or work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . . . Col. iii. 17.

THE advice, which the apostle gives in the words of my text, cannot be too frequently inculcated in these days of irreligion and immorality. The cares and solicitudes of the world so completely engross our thoughts, and its riches and pleasures are so universally the objects of our conversations and actions, that every other thing is disregarded and forgotten: so earnestly do we labour for the

bread that perisheth, that no time is left, no solicitude is felt for the acquisition of the bread which endureth unto life everlasting.

In vain does the Church declare that, if we labour exclusively for what passes with time, our labours are nugatory, and that we are like unto men who spend their time in raising heaps of sand, which roll down again on their heads, in proportion as they increase their height. In vain does the Church proclaim that one thing only is worthy of our serious attention, namely, the one which will continue with us during the whole term of our existence. We listen eagerly enough to what the world will tell us; but we never hearken to any of *her* admonitions. Notwithstanding her remonstrances, we labour for these perishable things with as much zeal, earnestness, and vivacity, as if we were labouring for goods which could never be taken from us: and we labour for

the real good things of eternity with as much languor and indifference, as if we were labouring for the things that perish.

What are the causes of this perversity in rational creatures? We are commanded by the apostle to refer all, whatsoever we do in word, or in work, to the glory of God; and we refer all to the world. We are commanded to make salvation our great, our only concern; and our great, our only concern is our welfare in the world. The investigation of this subject is of the highest importance, and worthy of your most serious consideration.

1. Salvation is the great, the only business for which we came into this world. Our all for eternity depends on it. We have, properly speaking, no other thing to do on earth. The various occupations and duties attached to the state of life in which we are placed,

are only so many means of attaining this wished for term.

This is a truth, which no Christian can refuse to believe: and yet, how little is it attended to! This happy term, to which all our actions ought to be referred, is overlooked and neglected. This principal employment, to which all others ought to yield, is the last that gains attention. This amiable occupation, to which all the consolations of heaven, all the sweets of virtue are annexed, is called tedious and burthensome.

The cause of this fatal neglect may be easily ascertained. We are deluded by the pompous names which the world affixes to the enterprises of ambition and vain-glory, and by the honours and titles with which it distinguishes its successful votaries: we are led to believe that actions thus ennobled and applauded, are truly great, and alone

worthy of our notice: we admire them; and in proportion as our admiration of them increases, we entertain a distaste for those more humble exercises—the exercises of piety, which have nothing to recommend them but their merit in the sight of God.—This is the first cause of the general decay of piety, and of the little solicitude that is felt for the kingdom of heaven.

But, my beloved, how degrading even to reason is this unworthy preference which is given to the glory of the world! Yes: *how degrading even to reason!* For, is it not agreeable to every principle of reason, that those actions should appear the most commendable in our sight, which are the most entitled to our admiration and esteem? Certainly it is. Now, what is there very commendable in worldly exploits? They will acquire, it is true, a reputation, and perhaps hand down the name of the celebrated hero to the

latest posterity. But what is all this? The monuments of pride and ambition will perish with the world that raised them: the victories and conquests which now shine with such lustre in the page of history, will be effaced from the memory of man, and be buried for ever in oblivion. But it is not so with the works of piety. They are worthy of immortality: they will be recorded in the book of life, and survive the wreck of the whole world.—The rewards of the *one* are vain and temporary; those of the *other*, infinite and eternal.—The most sublime occupations of the *one*, to which prejudice has affixed high-sounding appellations, are trivial and insignificant; those of the *other*, grand and important. Every action of the just man is noble and dignified: the object of his love is the Great Author of his existence — the Sovereign of the universe: he serves an omnipotent Master: he sighs after

eternal possessions: he forms projects for gaining heaven: he labours for an immortal crown. According to every principle, therefore, of right reason, we ought to acknowledge, that works which have eternity for their object, are the most noble works in which man can be engaged, and that, consequently, they are most entitled to our admiration and applause.

2. Secondly, we are indolent in the great affair of salvation, because we neither make it our principal business, nor give it the preference to our other occupations. We all desire to save our souls: the most abandoned do not renounce this consoling hope: we all perform actions, from time to time, which have this object solely in view; for we know that heaven is not to be obtained without some efforts on our part. So far we are consistent with our profession of the christian faith. But the misfortune is, that we do not pro-

ceed far enough. We do not allow the works of piety to hold that rank among the other occupations of our life to which they are entitled; and we are deficient in our attention to the few works of this kind that we do perform.

A slight inspection into the arrangement of your different employments will convince you of this truth. You have stated times in the day allotted for the duties of your state of life, for the concerns of your families, for your recreations and pastimes: but what allotment is there for the great business of salvation? What consideration do you give to that which ought to take place of every other consideration? Does it even enter into the arrangement of your various employments? or, if it does, is it not the first that is omitted to give place to any occupation or hurry of business that occurs? Do you not allow infinitely more to the

world, than you do to God?—Sometimes, perhaps, you bestow a trifle on the poor: but what is it, when compared with the sums you throw away in idle gratifications, and useless expenditure?—You, perhaps, lift up your hands to heaven, and pour forth your souls in fervent supplications to the Lord every morning and night: but when these are concluded, does not the world rush in, and engross all your other thoughts?—You assist from time to time at the holy mysteries: but is not that act of piety counterbalanced by your subsequent dissipation of mind, and inattention to every other spiritual duty?—You sometimes, perhaps, perform an act of self-denial, patiently endure an affront, forgive an injury, and mortify the sensual appetite: but are not these solitary acts, extraordinary occurrences, totally distinct from your common line of conduct? You can hardly produce one

action done for heaven, but a thousand may be produced on the other side, which the enemy will claim as done for him. Salvation is a business, to which you attend only at vacant moments: the world, and your temporal pursuits, occupy the far greatest share of your time and thoughts.

But, perhaps, you will say, "how can it possibly be otherwise? I devote a part of the Sunday to religious exercises: I allot to prayer a short time at morning and night; and more than this I cannot do. My state of life requires, that I devote my whole time to business for the support of myself and family." That this may be your state I will not deny: and far be it from me to censure your eagerness to fulfil these duties. But you mistake my meaning: you go upon the supposition that attention to your spiritual concerns is incompatible with the occupations attached to the state of life in

which Providence has placed you. This is not the truth. Every domestic duty that you perform may, if you please, be made to promote your sanctification: every christian virtue may be practised at the time that your hands are at work. Mortification and penance may be exercised when your employments are laborious and disagreeable: clemency and justice, when you are in authority over others: submission to the will of God, when success does not attend your labours, or when any afflicting circumstance befals you: forgiveness of injuries, when you are persecuted, calumniated, or injured either in your person or property: confidence in God alone, when you experience injustice or oppression from those above you.

When, therefore, we say that salvation ought to be your only concern, we do not pretend to insinuate that you must neglect your other duties

and abandon every other pursuit. This would be contrary to the designs of God. We only mean to inculcate, that all your actions must be performed with the view of pleasing God; that they must be sanctified by piety, animated by religion, and regulated by the fear of God; in a word, that the procuring the salvation of your souls must be the end and motive of them all.—Merit or demerit does not exclusively arise from the *nature* of the actions which you perform, but from the *dispositions of mind* with which you perform them. Application to your temporal duties will either impede or promote your sanctification according to the spirit with which you are animated. This is the point to which we wish to call your attention: every thing depends on this. But, unhappily, the spirit of piety is a spirit to which the greater number of Christians are strangers; and this may be assign-

ed as the third cause of your neglecting the only means of ensuring your salvation.

3. You are unacquainted with the true spirit of piety. The world and its vanities have made such deep impressions on your minds, that you vainly suppose that there is no other source of enjoyment and delight. You imagine that prayer is attended with no consolation; that retirement is melancholy; that spiritual reading is dull and insipid; that fasting and self-denial are insupportable, and even prejudicial to health; in a word, virtue appears to assume such a forbidding aspect in your eyes, that you shun its embraces; and, when you fulfil any duties, you fulfil them in as negligent a manner as if they were so many odious debts, which could only be discharged with a bad grace, and as if it were by constraint.

But, my beloved, this is not the description of true virtue: the ideas that

you entertain of it are suggested by your tepidity: the disgust that you feel does not arise from any defect in piety, but from the corruption of your own heart: it is not the chalice of the Lord that is bitter, but it is your taste that is vitiated: to a sick man every thing is loathsome. Were you to correct your failings, you would discover that the yoke of the Lord was light: were you to rectify your taste, which has been depraved by sin, you would experience that the Lord was sweet, you would be convinced that virtue was lovely and charming.

If words are not sufficient to remove your doubts on this subject, examine farther; go to the just man: look into his interior: behold with what delight and joy he applies to these irksome duties, as you call them: put your questions to him; ask him, whether his pleasures would be increased were he to intermit his pious exercises, and

live, like you, thoughtless and worldly? "Ah!" he would immediately reply, "how little do you know of the sweets of holiness! Could you but taste the happiness I enjoy, you would renounce the listless, the insipid life which you lead. From prayer I have learned to draw whatever can be had of pure and heartfelt satisfaction;—from works of piety, the most enlivening glow of pleasure;—from constant attention to the presence of God whilst my hands are at work, refreshment in the day of heat, and alacrity and joy even under the oppression of the most trying circumstances."—It is from the heart that every pleasure proceeds: that is the seat of all true enjoyment: were your hearts centered in God, you would derive pleasures from the things of God; but, as long as they are centered in the world, depend upon it, you never can taste any of the sweets of virtue: it is, and

must be necessarily, as long as these are your dispositions, irksome and uninviting.

4. The yoke of the Lord appears to be heavy and insupportable likewise on another account, namely, because you are not accustomed to its weight. A few transient moments, devoted to the great affair of salvation; a few trivial exercises of piety performed during the day, is the whole of your religion: and when these are fulfilled, you immediately turn from them, as from an insipid task, and fly with joy to your worldly pursuits. You allow not sufficient time for grace to alleviate the burden: you lose the sweets and consolations of piety by your impatience and haste. The kine, which the Philistines selected to convey the ark of the Lord beyond their frontiers, like those unhappy men who are not accustomed to the yoke of virtue, bellowed, says the scripture, and seemed to groan un-

der the weight of that sacred load: whereas the sons of Levi, being habituated, like the just, to the sacred ministry, carried it with dignity even over the burning sands of the desart, making the air resound at the same time with their canticles of joy, and praise.—The law of the Lord is not burthensome to him who is accustomed to fulfil it: the worldly soul alone, who is not familiarized with its holy observances, groans under the lovely weight. When our Saviour assured us that his yoke was sweet, and his burden light, he at the same time commanded us to carry it daily. Habituate yourselves, therefore, to the hardships of the cross; and then, after you have given proofs that you possess the fidelity of the just man, you also will experience the comforts and satisfactions that are within him.

5. Lastly, the works of piety are irksome and tedious, because you do not execute them in a proper manner. You

pray, but you pray without devotion: you fast, but you enter not into the spirit of compunction and penance: you refrain from injuring an enemy, but you do not love him as a brother: you approach to the holy table, but you possess not fervour, which alone can impart to you the ineffable consolations of the Holy Ghost.——Jesus Christ, my beloved, is not divided. The plenitude alone of the law can delight you. The more you retrench from it, the more it will oppress you: the more you endeavour to lighten the weight, the more heavy and fatiguing it will be. On the other side; the more you add to it, the more agreeable you will find it: the more austerities you practise, the greater pleasure you will enjoy. The reason is obvious: the imperfect observance of the law is caused by the heart not being entirely divested of its passions; and a divided heart, which has two objects of its love, is necessa-

rily, according to the declaration of our Saviour, a kingdom full of interior trouble and disturbance.

Serve then the Lord with your whole hearts, and you will serve him with joy: give yourselves up to him without reserve; make the full sacrifice of all your passions; fulfil the justice of the Lord with strictness, and it will pour the sweet oil of gladness over your souls. Be not deluded by the supposition that the tears of repentance are always bitter and sorrowful: the sorrow is only exterior. The just, like the burning bush of Moses, appear to be surrounded by thorns; but the glory of the Lord is within: you behold their fasts and austerities; but the holy unction which sweetens them all is concealed from your sight: you witness their silence, their retirement, their hatred of the world and its pleasures; but you behold not the invisible Comforter, who abundantly repays them for every sa-

crifice they offer up to him: in your eyes it seems that they lead a life of melancholy and affliction, it seems that their souls are troubled; but you see not the delight, the peace, and the serenity which reign within.—Yes, my beloved; on these chosen vessels of election the Father of mercies, and God of all consolation pours his choicest gifts, not only with a full and bounteous hand, but frequently with such profusion, that the soul, unable to endure the plenitude and excess, is obliged to entreat the Lord to restrain the torrent of his favours, and proportion the measure of his gifts to the weakness of his creature.

Make the experiment, my brethren. Put the fidelity of your God to the test. In this he loves to be tempted. Examine whether we have given an unfaithful representation of his mercies, or whether we attempt to allure the sinner, by holding out false promises

to entice him. Examine this: examine it thoroughly: and you will discover, that his gifts are far superior to the description we have given of them. You have already made trial of the world: you have found that it did not correspond with its promises. It engaged to give you pleasures, honours, and happiness; but you found that uneasiness, solicitude, and pain, was always your unhappy lot. Come then and try, whether God will not be more faithful to his word; whether he has promised more than he will give; whether he will be an ungrateful, inconstant, and capricious master.—O God! how little deserving wouldst thou be of our hearts, if thou wert not more amiable, more faithful, more worthy of our service than this wretched world!—Make the experiment, my brethren, with sincerity and ardour; and depend upon it, in a short time you will taste of that cup of pleasure, with which

every just man has been inebriated in this life: and when you have once tasted, you will find the vanities of the world so insipid, your hearts will be so captivated with the desire of drinking deeper of the cup of divine love, that you will never rest until the happy moment arrive, when you will be permitted to drink of the torrents of his delights in the heavenly Jerusalem.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

ON THE TRUE WORSHIP OF GOD.

We give thanks to God for you all.... being mindful of the work of your faith, and labour, and charity, and of the enduring of the hope of our Lord Jesus Christ, before God, and our Father. . . . 1 Thess. i. 2, 3.

THE commendations, which the apostle bestows on the Thessalonians in the epistle of this day, express both the sincerity with which they received the word of God, and the piety with which they fulfilled it: *they were a pattern to all that believed in Macedonia, and Achaia.* With humble simplicity they submitted to the law of the gospel; and, in opposition to the dictates of proud reason, they embraced

a mode of worship which, till then, was unknown, and which, even at that time, was rejected as folly by the Gentile, and as scandal by the Jew. They captivated their understanding to the obedience of faith; and so perfectly did *they serve the living and true God* in spirit and truth, and so widely was the fame of their faith spread over the Church, that it was unnecessary for the apostle to speak any thing.

Happy, my beloved friends, should we be, if, like the apostle, we could commend the humble and enlightened simplicity of Christians of the present times; if, like him, we could say, that *we were mindful of the work of their faith, and labour, and charity, and of the enduring of the hope of our Lord Jesus Christ before God and our Father.* ——But it is too true, that although the necessity of paying due homage to the Lord of Glory is acknowledged by all, there are few who pay it with sin-

cerity and truth. —— Some contend that the true worship of God is purely interior, and that the exterior observances of religion are unnecessary and useless. Others fall into the opposite extreme, and place such undue reliance on the observance of exterior duties, as to neglect the essential property of religion, which consists in the interior purification of the heart.—These dangerous, but prevalent opinions, I will combat in this discourse. In the first place, I will prove that piety must necessarily extend to the exterior observances of religious worship; and secondly, that piety consists not in exterior observances alone, but must extend to the right government of the passions, and to the removal of every defilement from the heart.

1. True worship, I acknowledge, such as is performed by the angels and saints in heaven, is purely interior. This is the religion of the just who are

gone before us with the sign of faith.—But during our abode on earth, the ministry of the exterior senses is indispensable: visible objects are required to awaken our faith, to inflame our love, to cherish our hope, and to excite our attention. This system of religious worship is the only one adapted to our present state. For this reason Abel offered sacrifices; Enos invoked the name of the Lord with exterior ceremony; the Patriarchs erected altars; and under the law, religious practices and observances were multiplied exceedingly. When the new law was established—the law of grace and love, the number of these observances was diminished, but exterior religion was not abolished: even a God became visible amongst us, in order to insinuate himself into our hearts by means of the senses: and the great sacrifice perpetuated on our altars under mystical and visible signs, was intended to be

the consolation and exercise of our piety, even to the consummation of the world.

Nevertheless, because it is acknowledged that the worship of God *essentially* depends on the heart, the world presumes to infer that exterior observances are superstitious and unnecessary; and that a man may be moral, upright, sincere, generous, and consequently acceptable in the sight of God, without all that display of religion, without that fasting and abstinence, which only tends to impair the health, and without that scrupulous exactitude in fulfilling certain exercises of devotion, which the cloister, and not the apostles, introduced into the Church; or in other words, the wisdom of the world objects against exterior observances of piety, on account of their pretended inutility, their simplicity, and the many abuses to which they are liable.

In the first place, the world pretends that the exterior duties prescribed by religion are useless and unnecessary, because they do not contribute to the purification of the heart.—This erroneous principle may be easily refuted. But before I proceed I will ask, where is the man who, at the time that he rejects the exterior part of religion, is scrupulously exact in the performance of the interior part, which alone, according to him, is essential? Where is the man, whose heart is sincerely devoted to God, at the time that he is exteriorly devoted to the world? Who will dare to say, that he is contrite, humble, penitent, and absorpt in God, at the time that he is immersed in worldly pleasures? Ah! the man who has once acquired the interior spirit of piety, never will dispute the necessity of exterior observances. The sacrifice of the passions is the only difficulty in a spiritual life; and when that

sacrifice is completed, the exterior exercises of religion are easy and agreeable, are readily acknowledged to be indispensable.

But let us proceed in the refutation. The same law, which commands us to believe with the heart, commands us likewise to confess with our lips, and to give public and avowed testimonies of our faith and piety: First, in order to return glory to God, to whom we belong, and to acknowledge openly that he alone is worthy of our homage and adoration:—secondly, in order to avoid the crime of ingratitude, which would attend the concealment of the heavenly blessings with which he favours us:—thirdly, in order to be free from the imputation of detaining the truth in injustice, and of behaving with a timidity unworthy of the majesty of the God whom we serve:—fourthly, in order to edify our brethren, and animate them to virtue by our example:

—fifthly, in order to encourage the weak, and enable them to withstand the influence of public derisions by the display of our own magnanimity :— sixthly, in order to make reparation, by the odour of a good life, for the scandal which our past misconduct has occasioned : — seventhly, in order to comfort the just, and to induce them to bless the riches of the mercies of God, which are manifested in our conversion :—lastly, in order to confound the enemies of religion, and oblige them to confess that true virtue is still to be found on earth.——These are the good effects produced by the exterior exercises of piety ; and that they are indispensable is tacitly acknowledged even by those who declaim against them. For, were the servants of God to adopt the manners and customs of the world, were they to confine their religious duties within the same circle as the declared worldling,

they would be the first to ridicule and censure them: "If heaven is to be gained at that price," they would say, "we ourselves may expect to be saints." Thus do they contradict their own sentiments, and out of their own mouths do they condemn themselves. *Luke* xix. 22.

The wisdom of the world, in the second place, objects against exterior worship, on account of the pretended simplicity and insufficiency of its observances. This regular frequentation of the sacraments, it is said, these set times for prayer, this eagerness in promoting pious undertakings, this zeal in extending the knowledge of the true faith, this respect for the laws of the Church, this exactness in performing certain pious exercises, these, and such like, it is said, are fit only for those bigoted and narrow minds, who cannot attain to that genuine piety,

which is centered in the heart, and which alone is worthy of man, and acceptable to God.

But, my beloved friends, may we not again ask these philosophic Christians, whether this pretended dignity and elevation of sentiment, which they claim exclusively to themselves, and which induces them to despise the humble and simple exercises of exterior piety, be not too frequently debased by the irregularity of their own conduct, and by the mean passions which they indulge? Ah! true it is, that the greater number of them are addicted to the most humiliating, the most degrading vices: they are passionate even to excess, and vain even to childishness; they are elated by the least trifle, and depressed by the slightest contradiction; they are guided by the instinct of the senses, like the animals of the field, and they exhibit nothing in their conduct that is either

truly great, truly exalted, or truly worthy of the sublimity and powers of reason. These, nevertheless, are the men who proclaim, that the exercises of exterior piety are calculated only for weak minds.

True greatness depends on the acquisition of an unrestrained power over the sensual appetites and desires, and on the exercise of a supreme dominion over the rebellious passions and corrupt inclinations. Without this, there is no true greatness: and this is to be found only in that society, which is as much overlooked and despised, as if it possessed none of the qualities which do honour to the dignity of human nature. — Behold the just man: — with what sincerity does he pardon the most poignant, the most malicious injuries! —with what fervour does he pray for those who hate and calumniate him! — with what horror does he avoid even the appearance of evil! In religion, in-

deed, he is simple, docile, and humble; and he even glories in his humble obedience and simplicity. He is prudent, like the serpent, with respect to evil; but he is simple, like the dove, with respect to God. These are virtues by which he alone is characterized; and these are virtues which must be united in the same breast, in order to form the perfect man. — They, on the other hand, who depreciate his merits, are the sport of the meanest and most contemptible passions: they are reeds which are shaken by every wind. In religious duties alone they pretend to greatness of soul. They are heroes in their opposition against God; but in their conflicts with themselves, they are pusillanimous in the highest degree.

The last objection which is urged against exterior worship is taken from the abuses with which it is too frequently accompanied. —— To this I

will reply, that abuses ought to be avoided, and that their existence throws no reproach on piety itself.—— However, on account of the frequency of abuses in the exterior part of divine worship, I will call your attention to them in the second part of my discourse.

2. Although the exterior works of piety are profitable, as I have demonstrated above, this is only to be understood when they are accompanied with that spirit of faith and love, without which the flesh profiteth nothing.

The sanctification of the heart is the principal object of every religious duty: if that end be not promoted, our piety is vain. In the sight of God, our only distinguishing characteristic is the heart: we are acceptable to Him only inasmuch as we love Him: our actions, our desires, our affections are agreeable to Him only inasmuch as they are referred to Him. The works,

which are performed without these dispositions, are unworthy of the Supreme Being; and before Him are no more than as the sound of brass, or the tinkling of a cymbal.

Reliance, however, on exterior works alone, divested of the interior spirit of faith and love, is an abuse which is almost universally diffused. ——Some people apply themselves sedulously to works of mercy, are affected at the sight of others woes, relieve their distresses, and never fail to distribute alms according to their abilities.--This undoubtedly is praise-worthy, and consonant with the precepts of the gospel. But they imagine, that this is the whole of their duty. They conclude that, because charity covereth a multitude of sins, the animosities, the dislikes, the detractions, and calumnies to which they are habituated, will not be imputed to them.—Others regularly attend at the celebration of the di-

vine mysteries, frequent the sacraments at stated times, are exact in the performance of their morning and evening devotions, and perhaps devote a few moments to prayer at other times in the day. All this is undoubtedly laudable, and even in some degree necessary. But they erroneously suppose, that the whole of piety consists in the regular performance of these exterior duties of religion without any other addition: they serve the Lord faithfully with their lips, but their hearts are far removed from him. At the time that they are offering up their supplications to heaven, they are devoted to the world and its pleasures;—they are unmortified in their affections, and strangers to self-denial: — they are more intent on the acquisition of the mammon of this world, than on the acquisition of a store of good works: —they look forward with more pleasure to worldly enjoyments, than to the

eternal happiness of the heavenly Jerusalem. This is certainly a delusion, and a delusion of the most dangerous kind. The scripture informs us, that the voice of the Lord must be obeyed, (1 *Kings* xv.): and that heaven is to be gained only by fulfilling his holy will, (*Matt.* vii. 21.) If therefore they neglect to subdue their passions, to renounce vanity, and to live a truly christian life, they neglect the essentials of religion: they do no more than display the outward show of piety like the Pharisees, and like them they may be called *whitened sepulchres,* (Matt. xxiii. 27.) richly ornamented on the outside with religious inscriptions and devices, and decorated with the figures of faith, of piety, of justice, and of mercy; but within, defiled with rottenness and corruption.

In our intercourse with the world, we place little confidence in the verbal professions of esteem, or friendship: we

are little affected by the officious attentions of those whom we know to be our enemies in private: we are attached only to those who favour us with a mutual attachment. And can we suppose that He, who calls himself a jealous God, the God of the heart;—can we suppose that He will be satisfied with exterior homage alone? Can we suppose that He has less discernment than men, and that He does not perceive the hypocrisy of our homage, and adoration?

How inconsistent even with the ideas of human wisdom, is the confidence which the abuse of piety inspires! and yet nothing is more common, and nothing is more prejudicial to the salvation of its unhappy victims.—Abandoned wickedness is frequently succeeded by repentance: the remorse and anxiety which haunt the conscience of the depraved libertine, frequently awake him from his sinful lethargy, and dis-

pose his mind to embrace a reform of life.—But the regular, and exact fulfilment of the exterior duties of religion calms the conscience, and forms, as it were, a cloud over the soul. The deluded Christian is neither alarmed, nor excited to repentance by the view of his frailties and defects; because he relies with thoughtless security on the mass of unprofitable good works which he has accumulated. The confidence, with which he is inspired by this supposed treasure, fixes his soul in a state of dreadful tranquillity, out of which, in all probability, he will never be awakened. Thus it was with the Jewish people. They were strict observers of the external works of the law, and they persevered in their iniquities even to the end. The prophets, whom the Lord raised up from time to time, endeavoured with the greatest earnestness to undeceive them on this subject. Confide not, they said, in the multi-

tude of your victims and offerings. Trust not in your works, and legal observances. The Lord requires, before all other things, a pure heart, a sincere repentance, a cessation from sin, a true love of his commandments, a holy and innocent life: *rend your hearts, and not your garments, and take away evil out of the midst of you.* Their remonstrances, nevertheless, were ineffectual: the temple, the altar, the sacrifices gave them confidence, and closed their eyes to their injustices, their fornications, and defilements. On other occasions, when they had fallen into idolatry, and had openly rejected the God of their forefathers, the prophets reclaimed them with ease; but when they were strict observers of the law, remonstrances were in vain: they thought that they were perfect, and would not believe that more was required of them.—On the same account, publicans and sinners were converted

by the preaching of Christ; but the Pharisees, — the men who resemble these half Christians, who were at the same time worldly and devout, who united the exercises of piety with the pleasures, the maxims, the passions, and the excesses of the world, were not converted, but died without compunction, in the same manner as they had lived, without apprehension or fear.

Ah! if the precepts of the christian religion extended no farther than to exterior duties, never would a pagan writer have declared that their sublimity and perfection surpassed the powers of human nature. Exterior duties are performed with little or no difficulty. Easy would be the acquisition of heaven, if nothing more was required. The sublimity of the christian rule consists in the interior duties which it exacts:—in the renunciation of self-will—in the regulation of the passions

—in the forgiveness of injuries—in the love of the most inveterate enemies—in the government of the tongue—in meekness, patience, and resignation under the severest trials—in the exercise of universal charity—and above all, in the decided preferment of the will of God on all occasions, before all the pleasures and vanities of the world. ——These are the difficulties of a christian life: these constitute its sublimity and perfection: these inspired the heathens with the highest ideas of the sanctity, the dignity, the wisdom of the moral code of Jesus Christ. Whereas exterior works alone, instead of being sublime, are vain and trifling; and instead of repressing the ardour of self-love, they increase it, and are on this very account performed by many, whilst the essential duties of religion are neglected. This is the last abuse which I shall remark.

Exterior works are good and neces-

sary, as I have already demonstrated; but it is criminal to give them the preference before the more indispensable obligations. — This abuse is very common: many Christians, who profess to live in the fear of God, perform extraordinary works of virtue, through no other motive, than because their vanity is flattered by the public approbation which they receive; and at the same time neglect the more humble duties, because they have nothing to recommend them but their merit in the eyes of the Supreme Being. Thus, for example, they distribute their largesses to the poor, and without scruple defer the restitutions which the law of God requires at their hands. They spend that time in prayer which ought to be devoted to their domestic concerns. They effect reconciliations between contending neighbours, and cause dissensions at home by their own capricious deportment. They conde-

scend to visit and console the poor afflicted members of Christ, and refuse to make the least advances to their own enemy, in order to induce him to a reconciliation, and to gain him over to Christ. They impose on themselves a daily task, consisting of a variety of prayers, and with the same tongue, with which they praise the Lord, they wound the reputation of their neighbour by backbiting and detraction: thus demonstrating that their religion is vain, and that they deceive themselves.

True piety requires that, in the first place, all the obligations peculiar to your state and condition in life be fulfilled. If you build not on this foundation, your works are dead, and, like stubble, destined only for the fire. The essence of a truly christian life consists in the faithful performance of every duty. When these are completed, then you may acquire merit from

extraordinary works of virtue. But you must never prefer the unnecessary before the indispensable, your own caprice before the law of God, or the chimerical perfection of piety before piety itself.

Avoid, therefore, with care, the two fatal rocks which I have described; —neglect not the exterior observances of religion, and confine not your piety to them alone.—True and solid virtue always keeps the just and equitable medium: caprice alone adopts extremes. Far be it from you to attempt to make any improvements in religion: piety is rational and sublime, provided you leave it in its present state: but if you pretend to purify it by the fancies of your own imagination, you will cause it to degenerate either into a philosophic piety, which affords no consolatory encouragement to the mind, or into a blind and superstitious zeal, which

reason despises, and which pure religion disavows and condemns.

Let us all unite, my beloved, and by our strict attention to every social, domestic, and religious duty, convince the world that piety is not the offspring of weakness or caprice, but that it is the only proper rule of conduct, the only preserver of order, the only ornament of reason, and the only wisdom which ennobles the mind of man.—Let us enter into the spirit of the maxims of our holy religion; and let us extort the confession even from the enemies of our holy faith, that piety alone can give dignity and elevation to our sentiments; and that no people are so mean and puerile, as they who are guided and enslaved by their passions. ——Let us exalt piety to honour, by leaving it in possession of its divine and amiable qualities—its meekness—its equity—its wisdom—its excellence —its equanimity—its disinterestedness

—its sublimity. Men, prejudiced as they are, will soon unite their suffrages in its favour, when they behold it in its true state, divested of our weaknesses and defects.——Thus shall we cause the name of the Lord to be praised even by those who know him not: and then we may reasonably hope to be united with them hereafter in a blissful immortality.

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

ON THE SMALL NUMBER OF THE ELECT.

Many are called, but few are chosen.
Matt. xx. 16.

THIS, my beloved brethren, is a sentence, which is seldom reflected on with that serious attention which its importance requires. It is generally supposed that salvation is attainable at a much easier rate than we represent it to be; and that the number of the elect far surpasses the number of the reprobate. But the words of my text declare, that *many are called, but few are chosen.*

Were it my intention to strike terror into your minds, instead of consulting your improvement by instruction, I would in this discourse enumerate the alarming examples, with which the scriptures are filled on this subject: I would tell you, that the prophet Isaias compares the small number of elect to the few bunches of grapes, which escape the eye of the vintager; to the few ears of corn, which chance only preserves from the sickle of the reaper. I would tell you, in the words of God himself, that there are two paths; the one, narrow, rugged, strewed with thorns, and frequented by very few;—the other, broad, spacious, adorned with flowers, and trodden by the far greater part of mankind. I would tell you, that the gospel unreservedly declares, that perdition is the fate of the multitude, and that the number of the elect bears no

comparison with the number of the reprobate.

But what profit would you reap from this discourse, were I to confine my observations to this subject alone? You would be informed of the danger, and you would not be acquainted with the means of escape. You would behold the sword of God's wrath lifted over your heads, and you would not be empowered to avert the stroke. Your peace of mind would be destroyed, and you would not discover the irregularities of your moral conduct.

For your instruction, therefore, I will examine the causes why the number of the elect is so small. I will apply the subject individually to yourselves, and examine the foundation, on which your hopes of salvation are established. Banish all foreign thoughts from your minds, and attend solely to my words. The subject is important, if any sub-

ject can be so: and more immediately relating to the concerns of your real, and immortal welfare than any thing, I believe, that has ever before occupied your attention.

1. The elect of God will be composed of people of two different descriptions; of those who have been so happy as to preserve their innocence spotless, and undefiled by mortal sin; —and of those who have regained their lost innocence by suitable works of penance. These are the elect. Heaven is open only to the innocent, and to the truly penitent. — Now, my brethren; of which description are you? Are you of the number of the innocent? or are you of the number of the penitent? Faith assures you, that nothing defiled can enter heaven. You must, consequently, either have avoided every defilement, or your defilements must have been washed away by sincere repentance. The first is a privilege

which is enjoyed by very few; and the second requires a grace, which, in the present general relaxation of morals and discipline, is either seldom received, or seldom corresponded with.

In those happy times, when the Church was an assembly of saints, few of the faithful, who had been cleansed by the laver of regeneration, and had received the Holy Ghost, relapsed into their former ways. Ananias and Sapphira were the only prevaricators we read of in the church of Jerusalem: one incestuous man only is recorded to have dishonoured the church of Corinth. Seldom was it necessary to subject a disciple to the rigours of canonical penance: or at least, the number of lepers, who were banished from the presence of the altar, and separated from the society of their brethren, was very small in comparison with the rest of the faithful.

But those times are elapsed; and

great is the change that has taken place. The gospel, indeed, has extended its empire, but the reign of piety is confined within narrower boundaries: the number of believers is increased, but the number of the just is diminished: the world is the same now as it was from the beginning, corrupt and profligate; its conversion to the faith has produced no change in its manners and customs; when it entered the Church, it introduced likewise its immorality and profaneness. Yes, my beloved, true it is that the land, even the land of Christianity, is infected by the corruption of its inhabitants: all work iniquity, and seldom is there one who does good. Injustice, calumny, lying, adultery, and crimes of the blackest hue lay waste the fair inheritance of Christ: hatreds are perpetual; reconciliations are seldom sincere; an enemy is seldom loved: detractions, and censures on the

conduct of others, are indulged on all occasions: and the gifts, which God intended for the support of the corporal frame, are abused by excesses too shameful for description. —— All states and conditions have corrupted their ways. The poor murmur against the rich: the rich forget the author of their abundance: the great seem to exist only for themselves, and licentiousness is made the privilege of their independent station.—Even the lamps of Jacob are extinguished: the salt has lost its savour: the priest has become like unto the people.—Behold, my brethren, the state of Christianity. And, my God! is this thy Church, thy Spouse, thy beloved inheritance? Is this thy delightful vineyard, the object of thy tenderest care? Ah! more heinous, or more enormous crimes were not committed in Jerusalem, when thou pronouncedst against it the sentence of its condemnation.

Thus, one gate—the gate of innocence, is irrevocably shut against us. We have all gone astray. There, probably, was a time, when sin defiled the heart of every individual of this assembly. The impetuosity of the passions has perhaps subsided in some: the world, perhaps, is become disgusting to others: grace, perhaps, has wrought the conversion of others: but there probably was a period, which we all look back upon with regret, and would gladly consent that it were for ever blotted out of the history of our lives.

But why do I lose my time in attempting to prove the loss of our baptismal innocence? We know that we are sinners: we dread the scrutinizing eye of an omniscient God; and we have too much reason to fear that he beholds innumerable stains even in that part of our lives which appears to us unsullied by any crime.—It is in vain,

therefore, to claim heaven on the score of innocence: consequently, there is only one road to salvation left, which is that of penance. After the ship-wreck of sin, this is the only plank, say the holy Fathers, that can save us.

2. Now let me ask, where are the penitents in this assembly? Are their numbers considerable? There are more, said a holy Father, who have never lost their baptismal innocence, than have recovered it again by true repentance. A dreadful sentence, my dear brethren; but, I hope, not too strictly to be enforced, however respectable the authority. We will not run into extremes. There are sufficient motives for alarm in the exposition of the known truth, without adding to them by unnecessary declamations. Let us only examine, whether the greater number of us have any right to expect eternal happiness on the score of repentance.

In the first place, what is a penitent? A penitent, says Tertullian, is one who, every hour, calls to mind in the bitterness of his soul the sins of his past life: who takes part with the justice of God against himself, and renounces innocent pleasures in order to atone for the criminal excesses which he formerly committed. A penitent is one, who treats his body as an obstinate enemy,—as a rebel, whom he must bring into subjection,—as a dishonest debtor, from whom he must exact the last farthing. A penitent is one, who considers himself as a malefactor condemned by the justice of God to death, and is convinced that his only portion in this life ought to be sufferings and contempt. A penitent is one, who is ready to submit to the loss of health and property, as to the just privations of blessings which he has criminally abused;—to crosses and afflictions, as to a punishment due to him on account

of his transgressions; — to corporal pains, as to a foretaste of the eternal torments which his sins have deserved. —This is the description of a true penitent. Now let me ask; where are the men in this assembly who answer this description?

Are they prostrate in the porch of the temple? Are they covered with sackcloth, and ashes? Do they supplicate the brethren, who are entitled to enter the sanctuary, to offer up their prayers to the Father of mercies in their behalf? Have they spent whole years in the exercises of prayer, of fasting, of mortification, and of other penitential austerities? Are they excluded from the Church, and forbidden to assist at the celebration of the tremendous mysteries? Are they treated as the outcast of men, and deprived of every consolation but that of their tears and repentance? This at least was the course of atonement prescribed to

the ancient penitents, and scrupulously fulfilled by them.

I admit that the Church has, long since, authorized a relaxation of this discipline; and my motive for hinting at the severities of those times, was not to lead you into a supposition that the observance of them was still necessary, or to cast reflections on the mild condescension of the Church in abolishing them; but to stigmatize the general corruption of the christian world which rendered the abolition necessary. External discipline must be accommodated to the manners and customs of the times. But although laws framed by men are liable to change, the laws of penance are founded on the gospel, and can never change We may satisfy the Church without the rigours of *public* penance; but we cannot satisfy either the Church, or God, unless by our *private* penance we make full atonement for our crimes.

Now, my brethren, what is your private penance? Is it proportionate to the penance of the primitive Christians? Is it proportionate to the number, and the enormity of your sins?—You perhaps may say, that you endure the cares and anxieties inseparable from your state of life: that solicitude for the present and future well-being of yourselves, and families, embitters your days: that you labour from morning till night, and that, in spite of all your endeavours, you are frequently the victims of want, of wretchedness, of infirmities, and of numberless other evils. This, perhaps, may be true. But do you submit to these trials with a truly christian spirit, without murmurings, without complaints? Do you submit to them in the spirit of penance, and offer them up to God as an atonement for your sins? If not, they will be found deficient in the scales of unerring justice; and they will not be entitled to

a reward. But supposing that you did not offend in any of these points; would you rank in the number of penitents? Would nothing more be required of you? Your merit, I allow, would be great. You would offer up an acceptable sacrifice of atonement to the justice of God. But would his justice be completely satisfied? The primitive Christians endured the ordinary trials of life with patience; and in addition, submitted to all the rigours of canonical penance: and yet did not do too much. Can your reconciliation be effected by easier means? Are not voluntary mortifications in private required of you? You know that the penance of every individual must be proportionate to his guilt: and can you reasonably entertain hopes of salvation, when your own penance is not regulated according to this maxim? Oh! be not deceived. The ways of repentance are far more painful than you

imagine: the road to heaven presents far greater difficulties to the sinner, than you have hitherto experienced. This is the real truth: and yet you spend your days in perfect tranquillity and peace!

You are not, indeed, singular in this respect. You do nothing more than follow the example of a great majority of your fellow Christians. You are not more attached to worldly pleasures, more averse to sufferings and crosses, more deficient in the works of repentance, than they. I allow that there are men of more dissolute characters; for I will not suppose that you are either destitute of religion, or unconcerned about salvation: but where are the men that are more penitent? Alas! the few that there are of this description, I fear, are chiefly to be found in the shades of sequestered solitude. Amongst the people of the world there is only a small number, who, by a little stricter

attention to religious duties, attract the notice, and, perhaps, the censures, and ridicule of the public. All the rest tread the same beaten path: children inherit the false security of their parents: seldom is there one that lives innocent; and seldom is there one that dies penitent. Good God! if thou hast not deceived us; if every precept of the gospel must be fulfilled to an iota; if the number of the reprobate will not induce thee to relax something of the severity of thy law; what becomes of that multitude of people, which daily drop into eternity before our eyes! What is become of our parents, our relations, our friends! What is their eternal lot!

Formerly, when a prophet complained to the Lord, that all Israel had abandoned his alliance, the Lord assured him, that he had reserved to himself seven thousand men, who had not bent their knee before Baal. But can

the faithful servants of Jesus be comforted with the same assurance in these days? There are undoubtedly many chosen vessels of election: the priesthood, the army, the court, the cottage have their ornaments—men according to God's own heart, with whom he delighteth to dwell: for the world exists only for the sake of the elect; and when their number is complete, the final dissolution will take place. But how few are they, when compared with that immense multitude which is hurried headlong into the deep abyss!

3. You, perhaps, have been encouraged to rely with confidence on your state, and to conclude that nothing more was required of you, because you perceived that you were as regular, as moral, as attentive to your duty as other people. But, my beloved, this, instead of being a subject of consolation, ought to strike you with dismay. Others, that is the generality of people,

live in a state of tepidity, and spiritual sloth; they are the slaves of pride and vain-glory; they are addicted to detraction, hatred, and other vices; they love neither God nor their neighbour, in the manner they ought; in a word, they walk in the broad road that leadeth to damnation. And can you imagine that you are secure, because you walk in the same path with them? The small number of the elect walk in the narrow path: their lives are regulated, not by the conduct of the multitude, but by the precepts of the gospel: their fervent piety, their strict morality, their penitential austerity, exalt them far above the rank of other people: they are, and have been in every age, men of singular lives: they shine like lights in the midst of darkness: they are spectacles worthy both of angels and men: they hold in abhorrence the ways, the maxims, the pleasures, and the vanities of the

world: they live, says St. Paul, not they, but Christ liveth in them.

Perhaps you will say, that the saints are exceptions to the general rule, worthy indeed of your admiration, but not fit for your imitation. That they are exceptions, I will readily allow. But they are exceptions only from that general rule of walking in the broad road of perdition. A chosen soul, in the midst of the world, must necessarily be an exception. — Are we then obliged to walk in the footsteps of the saints? We are. It is the duty of every one to be holy, and to be a saint. Heaven is open only to saints. There is no other gospel to be followed, no other duties to be fulfilled, no other promises to be hoped for, than those proposed to the saints. Every one is obliged to love God above all things, and his neighbour as himself: every one is obliged to seek heaven in the first place, to be meek and humble of heart, to

comply with every precept of the gospel, to avoid sin as the greatest of all evils, and to do condign works of penance for the sins, into which he has fallen: every one is obliged to do good, to advance forward in the ways of virtue, and to be perfect as his heavenly Father is perfect. These are obligations imposed on all: they are the same that were imposed on the saints; and the fulfilling them alone made them saints. Oh! if there were an easier road to heaven, it would certainly have been pointed out to us; it would have been traced out in the gospel; there would have been saints who would have walked in it; and encouragements would have been held out to us by the Church, to follow their easy example. But you know that there has been nothing of the kind. Good God! how little do men consult the dictates of reason, when their eternal salvation is at stake.

Be not, therefore, lulled into a fatal security by the assurance, that you are as virtuous as other people. On the contrary, beware of the multitude: walk not with the multitude, lest you share the same fate. Take your model from the saints, and imitate their virtues, and sanctity. If you are innocent, continue to fulfil every precept of the gospel; and, by self-denial and prayer, prepare yourselves for future temptations. If you are sinners, bewail your sins without ceasing: water your couch every night with your tears: put on the weeds of mourning; and anticipate the judgments of God, by mortification, and penance.—Enter on this penitential time with alacrity, and joy; and instead of seeking to increase, or of availing yourselves of the relaxations, which the multitude has extorted, vie with the penitents of old; make it a truly penitential time. Be not seduced by the examples

of the impenitent; but, with the chosen few, devote both body and soul to the painful works of fasting and penance. Then you may confidently hope that you will receive the reward promised to the truly penitent, and you will be united to their company hereafter in the joys of a blissful immortality.

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.

ON THE SMALL NUMBER OF THE ELECT.

A sower went out to sow his seed, and as he sowed, some fell by the way side . . . . . and other some fell upon a rock . . . . . and other some fell among thorns . . . . . and other some fell upon good ground, and brought forth fruit a hundred fold. Luke viii. 5, 8.

OUR attention, my beloved, is again awakened by a repetition of the dreadful truths, which were the subject of my last discourse. In this parable, the elect and the reprobate are plainly designated; and the comparatively small number of the elect is discernible to the slightest observer. In the first place, out of that immense multitude of people, who ei-

ther know not God, or refuse obedience to his authority, and throw off the restraints of religion, none are chosen; the parable does not even notice them: and the reason is, because, according to the scripture, they who believe not, are already judged. In the second place, out of the seed which God hath sown in his Church, watered with the dews of heaven, and nourished with the manure of his holy word, only one of the four parts described forms the number of the elect.——The man, who hears the word of God, but never follows it in practice, is rejected.—— The man, whose sloth and tepidity, like the dryness of a rock, prevent the word of God from taking root in his soul, and whose only efforts for salvation consist in attending at the service of the Church, and in performing a few exercises of devotion without the spirit, and without the fervour of divine love, is rejected. —— The man,

whose heart is divided between God and the world, and whose entanglement in the thorns of riches and pleasures draws off his attention to the duties of religion, is rejected. —— He alone, who hears the word of God, and keeps it; he alone, who seeks the kingdom of heaven in the first place, and makes salvation the great business of his life; he alone, who, notwithstanding the opposition of his own nature, and the influence of public example, serves his Maker in spirit, and in truth, and brings forth fruit in patience; he alone is admitted into the number of the elect, and entitled to the rewards prepared for the saints.—But, my brethren, where shall we find men of this description? That you may be enabled to form an idea of the comparative smallness of their number, I will describe in detail the obligations of a Christian; and I will examine how far they are observed by mankind in gene-

ral. Be attentive, for the subject is applicable to every individual in this assembly.

1. By the title and character of Christian, which we bear, we are obliged to renounce the world and all its pomps, the devil and all his works, the flesh and all its concupiscences. These are our engagements. These are the essential articles of the treaty concluded between us and God. On the fulfilment of these we shall be entitled to the promises, and not otherwise.

In the first place, we engaged in baptism to renounce the world and all its pomps. This engagement we made at the foot of the altar of God; the Church witnessed, and sealed it; and on this condition alone received us into the society of the faithful.

But what is this world which we engaged to renounce? I reply, that it is the world, to which the greater part of mankind are attached; and by this mark we may always distinguish it.

—The world is that multitude of sinners, whose desires and fears, whose hopes and solicitudes, whose joys and griefs are excited by the goods or evils of this life alone. The world is that great portion of the human race, who fix their affections on the earth, as if it were their true country; who dread the world to come, as if it were a land of banishment; who are less anxious about their eternal inheritance, than about their temporal pursuits; who consider death as the greatest of all evils,—the extinction of every hope, and the end of every enjoyment. The world is that temporal kingdom, where Christ is not known, or, if he be known, is not glorified as God; where his maxims are reprobated, his faithful servants despised, his blessings abused, his sacraments neglected, or profaned, his worship abandoned. This is the world which we have engaged to renounce, to avoid, to hate, to oppose by

our good example, and to resist with all our heart, and mind, and strength. This is the world which ought to be crucified to us, that is, ought to be the object of our aversion; and to which we ought to be crucified, that is, ought to be the objects of its censures and ridicule.

Now, my beloved, in what manner do we fulfil this engagement? Do we loath the enjoyments of the world? Are we grieved at the sight of its abominations, and crimes? Do we sigh after our true country, and lament that the time of our pilgrimage is prolonged? Do we wish to be dissolved, and to be with Christ?—No: we do nothing of the kind: or rather, we do directly the reverse. Our thoughts and affections are centered in the world: its laws are our laws: its maxims are our maxims: we condemn what it condemns: and we commend what it commends. When I say *we*, I mean the generality of Christians. I know that there are

many who complain bitterly of the world: who accuse it of injustice, ingratitude, and caprice; who discharge upon it the coldest venom of invective; and who describe its errors and abuses in the strongest terms. But, notwithstanding all this, they still continue to love it; they court its favours; they cannot live without it. Where is the man who can say from his heart that he hates the world, and that he has renounced its pleasures, its customs, its maxims, and its expectations? All are pledged, all, without exception, have entered into a most solemn covenant to do this, and not one will do it.

We engaged, in the second place, to renounce the flesh, and all its irregular inclinations, and desires: that is to say, we engaged to shun indolence and sensuality; to resist the cravings of a corrupted heart; to chastise the body, to crucify it, and to bring it into subjection. This was our vow; and

we are obliged to fulfil it: it is one of our principal duties: it is inseparable from the character of a Christian. And by whom is it fulfilled?

Lastly, we engaged to renounce the devil and all his works. If it be asked, what these works are? I reply, that they are the works which form the history of the most considerable part of our lives. They are ambition, pride, hypocrisy, vain-glory, and deceit: they are fraud, injustice, double-dealing, and lies: they are hatred, dissension, envy, and jealousy: they are worldly pomp and show, plays, comedies, and unprofitable parties of pleasure.

"What!" methinks I hear you say, "is the Christian to be debarred the theatres, and other public places of resort?" Certainly; if his innocence be exposed to danger. Every action that we perform must have for its object the greater honour and glory of God, or it is not innocent. Every work

that is not placed to our account in the book of life, is recorded against us. The weakness of human nature, indeed, requires pastimes and relaxations; but those pastimes and relaxations only are innocent, which may be referred to the honour of God, and which will enable us to apply with more vigour to our more holy, and more serious duties.

Now, according to this universally received point of christian morality, I leave you to decide whether the public amusements, above mentioned, are innocent or not. Do they unbend the mind only for a time, and thereby enable it to apply with more earnestness to the great affair of salvation? Can they be referred to the greater honour and glory of God? Is it possible to frequent them through motives of religion and virtue? No: the most profane Christian would blush to make the assertion. Consequently, your inno-

cence is not only endangered, but injured by them; and consequently, as often as you frequent them, you violate the sacred engagement to renounce the devil and all his works, which you contracted in baptism, and which you ratify by your public profession of the christian faith.

2. These, my brethren, are our baptismal vows. They are not matters of counsel only: they are not what we call pious practices. They are obligations the most essential—the most indispensable. And yet how few observe them! how few give them a place in their thoughts! Ah! did you but seriously reflect on the extent of the duties, which the name of Christian imposes on you: were you but once thoroughly convinced that you are obliged to hate the world, and all that is not God; to live the life of faith, to maintain a constant watchfulness over your senses, to be conformed to Christ

crucified; did you but seriously consider, that the great command of loving God with your whole heart and strength, is violated by every thought, every action, which is not referred to him; oh, you would be seized with fear and trembling; you would shudder at the sight of the immense chaos, which your infidelities have formed between you and God: you would exclaim with astonishment: "Who can be saved! if these are our duties; if this constant watchfulness, this pure and fervent love are required of every individual, who can be saved!" This would be your exclamation: and I would immediately return this answer: "Very few indeed will be saved:—you will not be saved, unless you reform your lives;—they, who live like you, will not be saved;—the multitude will not be saved."

Who then will be saved? The man, who, in these days of irreligion and

vice, walks in the footsteps of the primitive Christian :—*whose hands are innocent, and whose heart is pure ;—who has not received his soul in vain,* (Ps. xxiii. 4.) ; — who has successfully struggled against the torrent of worldly example, and purified his soul ;—who is a lover of justice, *and swears not deceitfully against his neighbour,* (ib.) ;—who is not indebted to double-dealing for an increase of fortune ;—who returns good for evil, and heaps favours on the enemy that had laboured for his destruction ;—who is candid and sincere, and never sacrifices truth to interest, nor conscience to civility ;—who is charitable to all in distress, and a friend to all in affliction ;—who is resigned in adversity, and penitent even in prosperity.

He, my dear brethren, will be saved ; and he only. Oh ! how alarming is this truth ! And nevertheless, all, the chosen few only excepted, who

work out their salvation with fear and trembling, all, I say, live on in the greatest peace and tranquillity of mind. They know that the greater number is lost; but they flatter themselves with the assurance that, although they live like the world, they shall die like the just: each one supposes that God will favour him with a particular grace: each one looks forward with confidence to a happy death.

These are *your* expectations likewise. I will, therefore, say no more about the rest of mankind, but address myself solely to you, as if you were the only inhabitants of the earth. Now this is the thought which occupies my mind, and strikes terror into the very centre of my soul. I suppose that the last day is arrived; that the trumpet has sounded; that you are risen from the dead; that you are assembled together in this place to wait the coming of the great Judge; that the heavens are

about to open; and that you will shortly behold the Son of Man descending with great power and majesty to pronounce upon you the sentence either of election or reprobation. —— Rouse your attention, my brethren. Are your accounts in order? Are you prepared for the trial? Are you ready to meet your Judge? Do not say that you will prepare yourselves hereafter. This is a delusive hope. What you are now, the same will you probably be at the hour of death. The intention of reforming your conduct, which has so long occupied your thoughts without effect, will continue without effect as long as you live. This is testified by the experience of ages.

Now I ask you;—I ask you with dismay, and without meaning to separate my lot from yours; were the Son of Man to appear in this assembly, and separate the good from the bad, the innocent from the guilty, the penitent

from the impenitent, how many would he place on his right hand? Would he place the greater number of us? Would he place one half? Formerly he could not find ten just men in five populous cities: and could he find as many, do you think, in this small assembly? How many, then, would he place on his right?—You cannot give an answer; neither can I. Thou alone, my God, knowest thy elect—thy chosen few.—But if we cannot say who will be placed on his right hand, we can say, at least, that sinners will be placed on his left.—Who, then, are sinners? They may be divided into four classes. Let every individual attend, and examine whether he may not be ranked in one of them. 1st, They who are immersed in vice, and will not reform: 2d, They who intend to reform, but defer their conversion: 3d, They who fall into their former habits, as often as they pretend to renounce

them: 4th, They who think that they need not a change of life. These are the reprobate: separate them from the rest of this assembly, for they will be separated from them at the last day. Now, ye chosen servants of my God —ye remnant of Israel, lift up your heads; your salvation is at hand: pass to the right: separate yourselves from this chaff, which is destined for the fire.——O God! where are thy elect! How few of us will be comprehended in the number!

Beloved Christians, our perdition is almost certain; and why are we not alarmed? If a voice from heaven were heard in this temple, proclaiming aloud that one of us here present would be consigned to eternal flames, without disclosing the name; who would not tremble for himself? who would not examine into the state of his soul? who would not, like the apostles at the last supper, turn to Jesus, and say: *Is it I,*

Lord? And, if time were still at our disposal, who would not endeavour to secure his own soul by the tears, and sighs of repentance?

Where then is our prudence? Perhaps not more than ten of my present auditory will be saved: perhaps not even so many: perhaps . . . But, O God! I dare not, I cannot fix my eyes on the dreadful, unfathomable abyss of thy justice:—perhaps not more than one of us will see heaven. And yet, we all flatter ourselves that we shall be the happy souls that will escape: we all imagine, without considering either our virtues or vices, that God will have mercy on us in preference even to those who are more innocent and deserving.

Good God! how little are the terrors of thy justice known in the world! The elect in every age withered away through fear, when they contemplated the severity, and the depth of thy judg-

ments on the sins of men. Holy solitaries, after a life of the severest penance, were terrified at the thought; and, when stretched on the bed of death, shook their hard couch of poverty and mortification by the trembling motions of their emaciated frame. They turned towards their weeping brethren, and with a faultering and dying voice asked them: "Do you think that the Lord will have mercy on me?" Their fears bordered on despair, and their minds were in the greatest agitation, until Jesus himself appeased the storm, and produced a calm. But now, the man, who has lived like the multitude, who has been worldly—profane — sensual — and unthinking, dies with the assurance of a happy immortality: and the minister of God, when summoned to attend him, is necessitated to cherish this false confidence, to speak only of the infinite treasures of the mercies of God, and, in

some measure, to aid and assist him in deceiving himself.—Good God! what wrath is stored up by thy justice against the day of wrath!

What conclusion, my beloved, are you to draw from these alarming truths? That you are to despair of salvation? God forbid. The impious man alone, in order to indulge his passions with less restraint, endeavours to convince himself that salvation is unattainable, and that all mankind will perish with him. My object is, that you should be undeceived, respecting that almost universally received opinion, that it is not unlawful to do what is done by others, and that universal custom is a sufficient rule for your conduct. My object is, that you should be convinced, that in order to be saved, you must live in a different manner from the generality of mankind, that your piety must be singular, and that

you must be separated from the multitude.

When the captive Jews were on the point of departing from their beloved country for the land of bondage—the great Babylon, the prophet Jeremiah, who was commanded by God to remain in Jerusalem, addressed them in words to this purport: "Children of Israel, when you arrive in Babylon, you will behold their gods of silver and gold, borne on the shoulders of the inhabitants, and the multitude before and behind adoring them: but do not you imitate their example; on the contrary, say in your hearts, *Thou alone, O Lord! art worthy to be adored,*" Bar. vi. 6.

My advice to you, at parting, is nearly in the same words; and I earnestly exhort you never for a moment to lose sight of it.—As soon as you have left the house of God, you will find your-

selves in the midst of Babylon. You will behold the idols of gold and silver, before which are prostrated the greater part of mankind: you will see the gods of this world, wealth, glory, and pleasure, surrounded by their numerous votaries and adorers: you will witness abuses, errors, and disorders, authorized by univeral example. Then, my beloved brethren, if you are Israelites indeed, you must turn to God, and say: *Thou alone, O Lord! art worthy to be adored.* I will not take part with people who are strangers to thee: I will follow no other law but thine. The gods, which the senseless multitude adores, are not gods; they are the work of men's hands; and they shall perish with them. Thou only art immortal: *Thou alone art worthy to be adored.* The laws of Babylon have no connection with thy holy laws. I will adore thee in the society of thy elect; and with them I will ardently

sigh after the heavenly Jerusalem,—the seat of bliss. The world, perhaps, may attribute my conduct to weakness, my singularity to vain-glory: but, do thou, O Lord, give me strength to resist the torrent of vice; and suffer me not to be seduced by evil example. The days of captivity will have an end. Thou wilt remember Abraham, and David, thy servants. Thou wilt deliver thy people from slavery, and lead them into Sion. Then shalt Thou alone reign over Israel, and over the nations that refuse to know thee. Then shall the former things pass away; and Thou alone shalt remain for ever. Then shall all nations know that *Thou alone, O Lord! art worthy to be adored.*"

In order, therefore, to profit by this discourse, you must be resolved to live differently from the rest of men: you must bear constantly in mind that the greater number are lost:

you must disregard all customs, which are not consistent with the law of God: you must reflect, that the saints in every age were men of singular lives. Then, after having been distinguished from sinners on earth, you will be gloriously separated from them for all eternity.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

ON THE FAST OF LENT.

When you fast, be not, like the hypocrites, sad.—Matt. vi. 16.

Gospel for Ash-Wednesday.

WITH this gospel, the Church ushers in the solemn fast of Lent. With this gospel she encourages us to put on the weeds of penance, and to endeavour with united efforts to disarm the wrath of God, to avert his impending judgments, and to expiate our sins. She exhorts us to enter on this holy time without sadness; because, fasting will enable us to triumph over the flesh, and the devil: and ought sadness and grief to

be indulged by the warrior who has the means of victory in his power? May our enemy alone repine at the approach of this happy season: may he be sad during these days of propitiation: may he be alarmed at the view of these consolatory appearances of repentance, and tremble at the display of the mercies which God has prepared for sinners. But you, my beloved, you ought to anoint your heads, and to open your hearts to the feelings of holy joy, and gladness: conquerors are never sorrowful.

There are, indeed, various kinds of sadness. There is a holy sadness—the sadness of repentance, which advanceth the great work of salvation, and is enlivened by the interior consolations of the Holy Ghost. There is likewise the sadness which is alluded to in the words of my text,—the sadness of hypocrisy, which observes the letter of the law, and puts on the ap-

pearance of rigid austerity, in order to gain the applause of men: this is very uncommon in these times. Lastly, there is a sadness produced by the depravity of corrupt nature, which revolts at the idea of self-denial, and restraint: and this I am grieved to say, is the sadness which is felt by the generality of Christians, and against which it is particularly necessary that you should be guarded.

The consequences of this sadness are obvious, and certain: every frivolous pretext is adduced for the purpose of obtaining an exemption from the rigour of the law.—In order, therefore, that you may not be led into error on a subject of this importance, I will display the futility of the pretexts which are usually alledged, and lay down in plain terms the conditions, on which alone a dispensation can be lawfully founded.

1. Were I speaking to men who despised the laws of the Church on this

head, and disputed her authority in enacting them, I would prove that fasting always was, and always will be necessary for the support of a truly christian life. I would go back to the pure ages of Christianity, and shew you that religion itself was nourished in the bosom of abstinence, and fasting:—I would say, that, after the ascension of our Lord, the disciples assembled in Jerusalem, and devoted their whole time to prayer, and fasting:—I would say, that the primitive Christians served the laborious apprenticeship to martyrdom in the austerities of fasting; and that, in the midst of the licentiousness of an idolatrous camp, the christian soldiers assembled together in order to celebrate, with greater solemnity, the fasts prescribed by universal custom:—I would say, that the emissaries of the persecutors designated the faithful by the paleness of their countenances, and by the odour

of sanctity, and mortification, which distinguished them from the rest of mankind:—I would say, that our mortal enemy, who is ever ready to extract pernicious effects from the most pious observances, stirred up many restless spirits to practise new, and extravagant abstinences, not with a view to the reparation of the injured justice of God, but with the idea that the meats themselves were unclean: so strongly was the whole christian world convinced, that, after the death of the Spouse, the obligation of fasting was indispensable.

I proceed, however, on the supposition that I am speaking to men, who are neither rebellious, nor obedient; who acknowledge the obligation of fasting, but who will not fast; who do not openly exclaim, with the impious, *I will not obey*, but who, with the men invited to the marriage feast,

(*Luke* xiv. 19.), find some plea or other, to excuse their disobedience.

In order to distinguish truth from falsehood in a subject of this importance, it is necessary to state, that, since the law of fasting is made, and received, it is impossibility alone that can justify the infringement of it: by *impossibility*, I mean, *a difficulty founded on evident and considerable danger:* for the Church established the law with the intent, not to destroy in this world, but to save in the next.

This being the truth, let us now examine your excuses. You say, in the first place, with great assurance and boldness, that you are dispensed with fasting for sufficient reasons; that your conscience does not reproach you on that head; and that, if you had nothing but the transgression of this precept to answer for before God, you could present youselves at his tribunal without fear: or, in other words,

that you have naturally a weak constitution, that you are not able to undergo the severities of fasting, and that the little health you enjoy, is entirely owing to care and precaution.

If it be true, that your weakness is such as you describe it to be, I will ask, whence did it originate? Was it not from this over solicitude and care to preserve it? Was it not brought on by that soft, voluptuous life which you have led? Was it not occasioned by habits of indolence, and by constantly indulging your sensual appetite in all its caprices? Were you, however, to examine impartially into the state of your health, you perhaps would discover that the constant aversion you feel for self-denial, and penance, has led you into an error on this subject; and that you imagine that your condition is weak, because you never have had piety and resolution sufficient to induce you to try its strength. If this be the case, as it

probably is, can you pretend that the very reason, which makes penance more necessary, is a sufficient plea for a dispensation? Your imaginary weakness is itself a crime, and ought to be expiated by extraordinary austerities, instead of exempting you from those which are common to all the faithful.

If the Church were to make any distinction amongst her children; if she was inclined to grant privileges to some and not to others, it would be to those, whose lowly, and dependent station exposes them to the hardships and fatigues of toilsome labour,—who suffer from the severities of seasons, from hunger, from thirst, from public oppressions, and from private wrongs,—who have only a distant view of the pleasures which this world affords,—and whose happiness has attained its greatest height—when a bare sufficiency is procured for themselves and families. But as for those, on whom

the world has lavished its choicest gifts, — whose greatest unhappiness arises from the satiety and disgust, which is inseparable from sensual felicity; they can pretend to no other distinction than that of increased austerity, and a prolongation of the canonical rigours of penance.

But what is their conduct? The opulent, the independent, the higher classes of society,—the men, who alone seem to need repentance, — the men, for whom this penitential time is principally intended, are almost the only ones who plead for a dispensation: whilst the poor artisan, the indigent labourer, who eats his bread in the sweat of his brow, — whose days of feasting and merriment would be to the rich man days of penance, and mortification, whilst he, I say, bows down with respect and submission to this holy law, and, even in his poverty, retrenches from his usual pittance, and

makes the time of Lent a time of extraordinary suffering and penance. But, my God! the time will come, when Thou wilt openly espouse the cause of thy holy law, and confound the advocates of human concupiscence. The Pharisees in the gospel disfigured their faces, in order that their fasting might be remarked by men: but this is not the hypocrisy of the present day; no: after a year spent in excess, in murmurings, and in sin, the pampered disciples of a crucified Jesus put on a pale, a weak appearance at the commencement of this holy time, for the sole purpose of setting up a plausible pretext to violate in peace the law of fasting, and abstinence.

My dear brethren, has the tenderness of your constitution ever deterred you from taking part in any worldly enjoyment? Ah! you can bear the fatigues of company, and entertainments; you can overcharge yourselves

with surfeiting, and wine; you can submit to the painful consequences of high living, and intemperance; you can keep irregular hours, and take other liberties, which would be felt by the strongest constitution. It is fasting alone that you cannot endure; then only are you particularly solicitous for your health, when penance is required.

Is it for me only, says the Lord by his prophet, is it for me only that you refuse to suffer, O house of Israel! You are indefatigable, and strong in the ways of iniquity, but in my service you are weak, and discouraged by the least difficulty. *Tell me if you have any thing to justify yourselves,* (Isa. xliii. 26.)

So it is, my beloved friends; and so it always has been: pleasures are never incommodious. The purchase of what you love, is always cheap. The slavery of the world, of riches, and of ini-

quity, is not painful, because you are worldly, ambitious, and sensual. But, if you could once divest yourselves of this spirit of the world, and imbibe the spirit of Christ; then, your strength would not fail you in his service; then, you would be convinced that the law of fasting was not a cruel and destructive law; then, you would acknowledge that the observance of your duties was not incompatible with the care of your health; then, with Daniel and the three children, you would experience that forbidden meats were not, by any means, necessary for the preservation of your strength, and vigour.

Supposing, however, that fasting does weaken your corporal faculties; is it not just that you should stamp the painful seal of the cross on a body, which has so often been marked with the shameful characters of the beast? Is it not time that members, which have served iniquity, should at length

be subservient to justice; and that grace should be strengthened in your infirmity?

The law of fasting was instituted for the express purpose of weakening the body: and if you experience sensations of languor, and faintness, it is no more than was intended: you have reason to rejoice on that account, for your merit will be proportionate to your patient suffering. The end, therefore, proposed by the law can never be a proper reason for a dispensation.

You perhaps may say, that the Church has approved your reasons, and released you from the obligation of fasting by the ministry of your director.

To this your own conscience will reply, that a dispensation, obtained contrary to the intention, and spirit of the Church, is void; and that the obligation is still in force: that is to say, that the dispensation, which is granted

without a sufficient cause, is not a dispensation in the sight of God. This is the doctrine of the saints. If, therefore, your reasons are not candidly, and truly of that nature as to require a relaxation in your favour, you impose upon your pastors, and you are transgressors every time that you avail yourselves of this fraudulent and unjust dispensation.

The Church, indeed, is not ignorant of the imposition. She sees with grief, that almost the whole of the submission of these loose and supine Christians consists in extorting her consent to the infringement of her own laws. And if, notwithstanding this conviction, she still appear to favour their unjust demands, she is influenced by the fear of driving them to extremities, and is willing to keep them in her communion by the simple ties of outward respect and obedience. But woe to the Christians who force her to this afflict-

ing alternative. The disease must be dangerous indeed, when the patient is allowed to choose his own regimen.

2. But allowing that your reasons are just, and that a dispensation is necessary, nevertheless it not unfrequently happens, that you transgress the law of penance by the manner in which you avail yourselves of this dispensation of the Church.

It is incumbent on you, as Christians, to lament your inability to observe the law, and to offer up to God the sacrifice of an humble heart, as a kind of compensation for the corporal penance, which you are unable to endure. Esther called on God to witness her necessity, and expressed her detestation, when she was obliged to partake of the profane meats, and banquets of the uncircumcised. Urias exclaimed, when he was pressed by his sovereign to go down to his own house, and enjoy the pleasures of a momentary

repose. *What! shall I eat and drink, while Israel and Juda are enduring the severities of the camp,* (2 Kings xi. 11.)

Are these, my beloved, your sentiments? Do you exclaim: "why am I constrained to spare this criminal flesh, while the Church is clothed in sackcloth, and ashes, while my fellow members in Christ are walking courageously on in the holy paths of penance? Why, O Lord! have I not sufficient strength to satisfy thy justice—I, who have had sufficient strength to offend thee? Why was I not endued with a bodily frame, capable of enduring every degree of fatigue, and torture, that the instrument of my crimes might be made the instrument of my punishment?"

Ah! if you were animated with the true spirit of piety, you would blush at a distinction so little merited by your past life: you would consider such a singularity as a kind of ana-

thema,—as a leprosy, which caused you to be banished from the society, and communion of the body of the faithful, and you would endeavour to compensate for your bodily infirmities by the strength and vigour of your interior piety.

In the second place, you must reflect, that the dispensation from fasting does not include a dispensation from doing penance. The Church has no intention of taking the cross from your shoulders: she is not authorized to do it: she can do no more than lessen its weight, and proportion it to the strength of the bearer. Lent must be, in some manner or other, a time of penance. St. Paul says, that he, who does not distinguish the eucharistic bread from common food, is guilty of the body of the Lord: and I say to you, that, whatever your infirmities may be, if you do not make a distinc-

tion between the time of Lent, and other times, you are guilty of the law of fasting.

Now, what distinction do you make? Do you pray more than at other times? Are you more charitable to the poor? Do you soothe the afflictions of the suffering members of Christ, and make amends in their persons for the extraordinary gratifications which your infirmities require? Do you abstain from lawful pleasures, which are not necessary for your health? Ah! my brethren, a compensation must be made. He, who cannot offer a lamb in sacrifice, must offer a pair of doves. The justice of God must be satisfied. If you cannot crucify your flesh by fasting, you must chastise it by abstaining from unnecessary pleasures: you must mortify your turbulent passions by retirement: you must have less communication with the world: you must be more attentive to your

domestic concerns: you must be more assiduous in frequenting the place of worship, in receiving the sacraments, and in performing works of mercy: you must be more circumspect in your whole conduct. This, says St. Chrysostom, is the fast, which the Church requires from the infirm. To comply with this, neither health, nor strength are requisite: a firm faith, and the fear of God, will alone enable you to perform it. But, alas! a firm faith, and the fear of God, are precisely the virtues to which you are strangers. You object to sufferings of every description. You imagine that you are freed from all restraint, as soon as you are dispensed with fasting: and because you are not able to comply with the whole precept, you joyfully conclude that you are not obliged to do any thing.

There are many, I know, who say, that fasting is a matter of no great importance: that the great point is to

be good moral men: and that, as to food, whether it be this or that, whether they take three meals or one, it can be of no such consequence in the sight of God, as to justify the declamations of the Church, or be a sufficient reason to subject the faithful to so many inconveniences, and vexations.

Thus, the children of the world are not satisfied with merely violating the law of fasting, and abstinence, they proceed even to abuse; they vilify it, by giving it the name of prejudice which custom has established: and they put on the appearance of reason, in order to infringe it without scruple. But what do they degrade? They degrade the most venerable tradition of the Church, the most ancient, and the most universal point of discipline, which has descended to us from our forefathers. The respectable institution of fasting, established by the apostles, consecrated by the custom of

ages, honoured by the examples of patriarchs, and prophets, and of Jesus Christ himself, is nothing more, in their language, than a popular devotion —a pious prejudice, of which enthusiasm alone can exact a rigorous, and minute observance.

These, however, I trust, are not the sentiments of any individual of this assembly. If, therefore, I will say in conclusion, if your infirmities require a dispensation, indulge not beyond the calls of necessity. Let your repasts savour of the frugality of this time of penance; let them be stampt, in some part or other, with the seal of mortification. Remember, that, although the Church consents that you do not accompauy Moses on the mountain to fast thé forty days, she expects that, while you remain in the plains below, you neither partaké of the profane enjoyments, the excesses, and the festive sports of the Israelites, nor unite with

them in the adoration of the golden calf.

Let us, my beloved brethren, enter into the true spirit of this holy time. Ah! can you remain unmoved at the affecting spectacle, which will shortly be displayed before you? When you behold the Church in affliction, and clothed in the weeds of mourning and sorrow; when you behold her ministers prostrate, and weeping between the porch and the altar; when you behold your brethren armed with the weapons of penance, and fighting with determined resolution against flesh and blood, will you be able to refrain from uniting with them? Will you have resolution sufficient to continue immersed in the enjoyment of sensual pleasures?—If the body cannot take part in the penitential works of the faithful, at least change your hearts, and be converted to the Lord. If you cannot rend, by fasting, the garment

of flesh, which encompasseth you, rend your hearts, says the spirit of God, by the tears of grief, and compunction. Surpass your brethren in the dispositions of your minds, if you cannot follow them in the exercises of the body. —In a word, live more holily than they, and you will fast more profitably. —Thus, you will glorify God in your infirmities, and in the end receive the reward, which is promised to the truly penitent.

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT.

ON THE ABUSES OF FASTING.

And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterwards hungry. . . . . Matt. iv. 2.

WHAT an example, dear Christians, is displayed before our eyes in the gospel of this Sunday! Innocence itself—the Lamb without spot—the Holy One of Israel, fasts in the midst of a dreary solitude! He fasts, not during a small portion of the day, nor from one only kind of food, like his pretended disciples of these times; but he fasts during the protracted space of forty days, and forty

nights; he abstains from every species of corporal nourishment. Prayer and contemplation are his only food: tears, and supplications for lost man, are his only employment. The anguish, and horror excited by the view of the innumerable sins, and of the obstinate impenitence of mankind, render him insensible to the cravings of hunger and thirst: and the ardent longings of his soul to effect our deliverance from them, cause him to submit with alacrity and joy to every pain, to every labour and fatigue.

Can we, my beloved, view this example of the Son of God with indifference at this holy time? Can we, the authors of his sufferings, — the victims, who alone ought to be devoted to sacrifice, can we, I say, refuse to mingle our tears with his? Can we steel our hearts against the sorrows of repentance? He suffered voluntarily; and he suffered for our good alone: we are command-

ed to suffer; and to suffer for our own salvation.——What more powerful incitement could be proposed to us, than the sight of a God-Man fainting under the languors of fasting? But, alas! I fear, that the greater number of Christians, instead of being inspired with a holy ardour, are solicitous only to avoid the rigours of the law, and to add to the mitigations which the relaxed morals of our forefathers have introduced.

My object, in thus introducing the subject of fasting to your notice a second time, is to lay before you the extent of your obligations at this season, both as Christians, and as sinners.

1. There is hardly any precept more universally abused than is the precept of fasting. At a time, when the judgments of God are heavy upon the nations of the earth, and fasting and prayer are the only means of restraining his just indignation, Christians are

solicitous only for an increase of the relaxations of the Church, and for a total abolition of every thing that is painful to flesh and blood. They say, that, in the first ages, when innocence and simplicity prevailed, severity of discipline was seasonable; but that, in these times, when immorality has spread its baneful influence on every side, a greater latitude, or even free liberty in the article of penance, is the only proper system to be adopted.

Instead of entering into a refutation of this irreligious principle,—a principle which, I trust, is not entertained by any one in this assembly, I will examine what bounds the Church has thought proper to prescribe to her condescension, and I will endeavour to distinguish those relaxations, which a vitiated custom has introduced, from the mitigations, which she either authorizes or tolerates. These may be collected from the motives which

first gave rise to the institution of the law.

The law of fasting was instituted for the express purpose of crucifying the flesh, in order, says St. Chrysostom, to fortify the soul against future temptations; and to contribute to the expiation of past sins. Our fasting, therefore, must be sufficiently rigorous to answer this desirable end; otherwise, our fasting will be fruitless.

The flesh is crucified, and the passions are weakened, either by the length of abstinence, by the simplicity of food, or by frugality in meals.—Excuse the detail into which I must enter; it is indispensable; and I will be as concise as possible.

The length of abstinence is the first. —The primitive Christians never broke their fast before sunset: and for this their slender meal they prepared themselves by an uninterrupted application to works of piety. They frequently

watched in the temple, singing hymns and canticles over the tombs of the martyrs, during the whole preceding night. This was their fast; and by the length and severity of their sufferings, they succeeded in weakening their flesh, and in opposing an effectual barrier to their criminal passions.—But, my beloved brethren, what benefit do we reap from the severity of our fasts? What are our fasts? In addition to the indulgence of the Church, which has advanced the hour of repast, and has, moreover, tolerated a small refection in the morning, and at night, we take the most unwarrantable licences. Our whole attention is apparently absorbed in devising means to arrive at the time of meal without pain or languor. We avoid the craving of hunger with the greatest care; not considering that the fast even of our Saviour was not exempt from it. And if, notwithstanding our care, we feel a slight faintness and de-

bility, we gladly take alarm for the safety of our health, and plead for a dispensation.

But, my beloved, do you not know, that at this time you ought, with the Royal Prophet, to prevent the rising sun, in order to prolong your fast, and to unite your prayers with those of the Church; that you ought scrupulously to offer to the Lord the first fruits of a day which is to be sanctified by penance, and that you ought to put to profit every moment of this time of grace and salvation?

Not sufficiently gratified with these liberties and relaxations, you frequently make it a subject of enquiry, whether the fast is injured or broken by drinking out of meal-time? I reply in the first place, that, it being the intent of the law of fasting, to mortify the sensual appetites, and particularly the taste, every liberty, between meals, which is favourable to this sense, is a

kind of infringement of the law. I reply in the second place, that every mitigation of the pains of abstinence is contrary to the spirit of the law.—But, supposing that the unlawfulness of it were only doubtful, would you be prudent in exposing yourselves to the danger? This, at least, is incontestible, that these mitigations are of new date; and that example can neither justify an abuse, nor constitute any thing like a prescriptive right in opposition to a positive injunction.

Allowing, however, for argument sake, that these relaxations are innocent; nevertheless, out of respect for this holy time, you ought to abstain from them. You have many unlawful gratifications to atone for; and when will you atone for them, if, even in Lent, you will not refrain, in the spirit of piety and penance, from things which you deem to be lawful at other times?—Do not, my beloved friends,

suffer yourselves to be so very easily imposed upon: our fasts are already so much relaxed by the tolerance of the Church, that we cannot pass the bounds which she has prescribed, even in the most trifling degree, without incurring the guilt of venial sin. Her indulgence has been extended to the utmost limits, and beyond them we cannot take one step without transgressing.

2. In the second place, what shall we say of the simplicity of food, and of the frugality in meals, which ought to be observed at this holy time? In Lent, says St. Leo, we should live sparingly; we should feed the poor members of Christ with what we retrench from our tables; and our frugality, as the apostle insinuates, should impart abundance to our suffering brethren.—But is this our rule of conduct? The fact is, and it neither can, nor ought to be dissembled, that we seek to gratify the

sensual appetite as much in Lent as at other times. We procure every delicacy that our means will permit: and if we be so situated, that we cannot procure so great a variety as we wish, we either violate the fast by taking meat, or we forfeit the merit of it by our impatience and complaints.

I say nothing of our temperance in the one meal allowed: for we seldom prescribe any other limits to our appetite, than what are suggested by sensual avidity. —— In what part of our fast, then, is any merit to be found? In the morning, the generality, so far from adhering strictly to what is tacitly allowed in this kingdom, and which is very little, abstain only from butter, and take their fill nearly as usual. At the great regular meal of the day, every thing is given up to the gratification of the appetite. And it is known that their collations, as they are called, do, in point of quantity at least, differ but little from

their common evening refreshments: sensuality, indeed, they cannot indulge, because there is no tempting variety of food, but they eat unsparingly of what there is.—Thus, abstaining from what are called *white meats* at night and morning, and from *flesh meat* once or twice in the week oftener than usual, is the only penance that we perform in Lent: or in other words, the relaxations, which our forefathers would have considered as a grievous infringement of the precept, we consider as the highest point of observance.

You are well acquainted, my brethren, that the Church existed a thousand years before any indulgence was granted to the faithful. One repast, taken in the evening with thanksgiving, terminated the abstinence of the whole day. And then, what a sorry repast! It consisted of herbs and vegetables: a repast of mourning, and penance; where every thing breathed

the mortification of Jesus. Pious conversations, spiritual reading, and exhortations to martyrdom, were the only seasoning; and they eat rather to prolong their sufferings, and to satisfy nature, than to flatter sensuality.

The diminution of charity in the breasts of the greater number of her children, obliged the Church in after ages to relax from the rigour of her discipline in this point: she, however, acted as creditors are accustomed to act with their bankrupt and insolvent debtors; she made a composition with their tepidity; she saved what she could of the wreck, and acquitted them of the rest with regret.

Every indulgence, therefore, which the Church allows in addition to the one meal, is a favour which she has granted through necessity. Our precautions not to exceed cannot be too rigorous. —— But where are the men, who are solicitous to keep within the

narrow limits? Alas! few of this description are to be found: there are none, I fear, except a small number of retired souls, penitent solitaries, chaste and tender virgins, habituated to the yoke of the Lord from their infancy. From appearances, one would judge that severe discipline was intended for them alone; and that criminal, worldly-minded men, after a life of wickedness and excess, were authorized to mitigate and retrench every remnant of penitential austerity.

Such, my brethren, is our fast of Lent. Without the smallest intention to exaggerate, such it is as I have described it: such and no better. This, then, in its fullest extent, is the entire course of what has always been considered as the first and greatest of all our penitential labours. And these are the offerings which we make to God: these the remains of that venerable institution, which has been handed down to

us from the earliest times of our apostolic ancestors: these the fasts, formerly so famous amongst Christians, and consecrated by the memorable examples of Moses, of Elias, and of Christ himself.

3. I will not, however, dwell on this discouraging subject any longer, but continue the series of instructions which I had formed for your benefit at the commencement of this penitential season. Let me exhort you, therefore, in the first place, to bear in mind that your works of self-denial and mortification, at this time, must be devoted to the expiation of the pleasures and crimes of the past year.—According to the gospel, indeed, the whole life of a Christian should be devoted to mortification. But in these days of degeneracy, the Church despairs of inculcating with success the necessity of an uninterrupted course of penance; and therefore, she insists particularly on the

due observance of this time, lest the spirit of penance should be totally extinguished in the breasts of her children —Fulfil, then, with alacrity this easy course of penance which she imposes on you: and may the trivial sufferings you will endure supply for every other deficiency. Submit with joy to so lenient a law. Do not murmur under so slight a yoke; and do not exaggerate the inconveniences you may experience, nor complain of the rigours of this relaxed remnant of primitive discipline.

Remember, likewise, that as the object of the fast is to satisfy the justice of God for your former infidelities, you must be particularly on your guard against the commission of fresh crimes. If you are not, you destroy with one hand, what you raise with the other; you offend your Judge, at the time that you are endeavouring to appease him.—What will it profit you to ab-

stain from meats, which are good in themselves, which God hath created, and which may be lawfully eaten at other times, if you abstain not from sin, which, at all times, and in all seasons, is strictly forbidden by the law of God? What will your fasting and abstinence avail you, if they are not accompanied with purity of conscience, which alone can insure you a reward from the great Searcher of hearts? Oh! be not deceived; suffer what you will, unless you refrain from sin, God will pay no regard to your sufferings: fast as rigorously as you please, God, says the prophet, will reject your fasts. For, can you suppose, even for a moment, that fasting consists wholly and entirely in abstaining from forbidden food? This was the fast of the Jews, who followed only the letter of the law, which killeth. The fast of Christians is sanctified by renouncing the ways of sin, and is consummated by subduing

the passions.—If, therefore, you are not more chaste, more humble, more charitable, more patient, you fast not, or at least you fast in vain. The law of abstinence was instituted to promote a reformation of your lives; and if you reform not, you do not fulfil the law, or, at least, you fulfil it without profit.

Remember, in the third place, that, as it is your duty, at this time, to satisfy the justice of God, you are not only to avoid sin, but you are required to refrain from amusements, which may, perhaps, be innocent, and lawfully indulged at other times. You are now public penitents, striving to disarm the anger of the Lord. Tears, silence, prayers, are the only occupations suited to your penitential course. Plays, parties of pleasure, indolence, and unnecessary pastimes are forbidden. If you partake of them, you renounce the character of true penitents; you abandon the enterprise, you interrupt

your course. Yes: you violate the law of Lent, as often as you mingle the pleasures of the world with the holy afflictions of penance.

Lastly, remember, that it is the intention of the Church, that you prepare yourselves during these days of penance, for the grace of the resurrection, and for the participation of the Lamb of God, the true christian passover.—Begin, then, betimes, to eradicate your vicious habits. Begin, immediately, to abstain from the sins to which you have been hitherto addicted, and which you will lament at the feet of God's ministers at the conclusion of this season. For why should you defer your preparation for the adorable sacrament till the festival is at hand; and either expose yourselves to the danger of an unworthy communion, or compel the judges of your conscience to refuse you the bread of heaven, at the time when they are

breaking it for the rest of your brethren?—Begin, I say, betimes: try your strength; try beforehand, whether your resolutions are sufficiently firm to ensure your fidelity to the promises of amendment which you will then make to God. It is a dreadful thing to be exposed to the danger of sacrilege and perjury. Fight resolutely; and prepare yourselves in such a manner, that you may be able to alledge the past as an earnest for the faithful performance of your promises for the future. The time that intervenes is certainly not too long for your preparation, after the life that you have led. The space of forty days is not more than is necessary for purifying your souls from the defilement of sin, and putting things in order for the reception of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Hearken to the admonition of the apostle read on this day: *Behold now*

is the acceptable time: behold now is the day of salvation, 2 Cor. vi. 2. Shake off immediately the odious yoke under which you have hitherto groaned; and enter seriously on the ways of penance. You have never experienced any real pleasure in the paths of sin. The days, in which you seemed to enjoy them, are gone. The charm, that glittered before your eyes, is vanished; and nothing remains but the agonies of remorse in this world, and the prospect of eternal misery in the next. What are the advantages you have derived? Where are the fruits you have reaped from your multiplied excesses? Ah! you forged new chains to aggravate your slavery; you prepared fresh ingredients to embitter your cup withal. Let the experience of the past undeceive you; and return at length to the Lord. Return to him for the love of virtue; but if that motive be insufficient to influence your determina-

tion, fix your eyes on the vanity and emptiness of all the pleasures of iniquity, and return to him on that account.

Great God! I acknowledge this day in thy presence, that I have never enjoyed any real pleasure at a distance from thee: may thy holy name be for ever blessed. Reject not these feeble commencements of my repentance. I have run with sinners, and have trod in all their ways. But, my God, I here confess that all the pleasures of the world were insufficient to satisfy my desires; and therefore I renounce them for ever. To acknowledge that this were the motive of my return to thee, would overwhelm me with confusion, were I not convinced that it was thy grace, O merciful God! that embittered my palate, and rendered insipid all the delights which the world presented to me. For, how many souls are there, who are

never disgusted with vanity, never wearied with iniquity? How many souls are there, who are buried in a profound sleep even to the end; who open not their eyes until time is no more; until, struck with the agonies of death, and already judged, they are on the point of appearing before thy terrible tribunal?

Increase, O God, these first symptoms of disquietude, which thy grace has excited in my soul: increase them, I beseech thee, and cause me at length to feel that happy anxiety, which leads to true repentance. Add to the disrelish of unlawful pleasures, that true love of justice and virtue, which will complete thy triumph over a corrupted heart, and from a vessel of wrath, change it into a vessel of election and honour.

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT.

ON THE MOTIVES FOR A CHANGE OF LIFE.

This is the will of God, your sanctification. . . . . . I Thess. iv. 3.

GOD, whose mercies seem to be more abundant in proportion as our iniquities increase, commissions me again to declare to you, that in the dispensations of his justice he has your sanctification alone in view.

In the old law, when his people had abandoned the ways of virtue, He sent his prophets to announce that his avenging arm was extended; and, by

the terror of his threats, He stemmed the course of their crying enormities. ——Then Jerusalem cloathed herself in sackcloth and ashes: her priests wept between the porch and the altar: her elders assembled in the temple, and with their enfeebled voices invoked the God of Israel: the bride neglected the ornaments of her state: the desolate virgins made the air resound with their sighs and lamentations: and the Lord, moved by their tears and repentance, restrained his arm, and looked down with pity and compassion on that unfaithful city.

Our ministry, in these days of salvation, is the same. As all flesh hath corrupted its ways, he sends us, as he formerly sent the prophets, not to announce future calamities, but to excite you to repentance by the view of the chastisements which he has already inflicted on the christian world. He endeavours to draw you to himself, not by

threats, but by the evils which he has scattered with profusion around you. —We are not, however, sent by an implacable Judge, but by a God, who pities your blindness, who wills your sanctification, and who opens to you the bosom of his eternal mercies.

Attend, therefore, beloved Christians, to the voice of the Lord. Behold now is the acceptable time; harden not your hearts. Be converted to me, saith the Lord, in fasting, and weeping, and supplications: rend your hearts, and not your garments; and be converted to the Lord your God, because he is compassionate, and rich in mercies, and because he is ready, on your repentance, to suspend the calamities which his justice has begun to inflict upon you.

This is the day of salvation. The gates of heaven are thrown open: the blood of Jesus pleads powerfully in your behalf: the cross is dis-

played before you. Resist not, my beloved friends, these graces of your God: he invites you to return to him by every motive: he strikes terror into your souls when you look back on your past sins; he encourages you by the example of Jesus, and of all his elect throughout the world; he assists you by the prayers of the whole Church; and he terrifies you by the public calamities which his justice has begun to inflict on the earth.

These are the motives which I am commissioned to lay before you, in order to hasten your return to God by a sincere and perfect conversion.

1. Were you to call to mind the history of your past life, you would there alone discover sufficient inducements to determine you to put your house in order without delay against the great day of the Lord. Consider for a moment, what your life has hitherto been. Beginning from the moment that you

received your existence from God, what use have you made of your reason, of the powers of your body, and of the faculties of your soul? How did you employ your youthful years? What profit have you reaped from your talents and acquirements? How have you spent the time which ought to have been employed for heaven? How have you endured afflictions, losses, and sicknesses? What use have you made of the mysteries of religion, of its solemnities, and sacraments, of the instructions, and of all the other aids with which Christianity has supplied you—aids, which inspired the saints with an increased ardour in their spiritual warfare, and by the means of which they were enabled to complete the edifice of a truly christian life? Take, then, I say, a retrospective view, and you will behold, with astonishment, that your whole life has been a continued tissue of excesses, of crimes,

of tepidity and sloth. If at any time the thread has been broken; or in other words, if, from time to time, you have listened to the inspirations of heaven, and have felt the glow of divine love in your breasts, you have steeled your hearts against it; you have quickly returned to your former ways, and have added to your other crimes the guilt of turning your backs on the gracious invitations of your Redeemer.

How indispensably necessary for your eternal welfare, my beloved, is a change of life! And have you as yet fixed the time for your conversion? Reflect that your days flow rapidly on; years roll away in quick succession; youth is vanishing; and life itself is on the wing. Your friends, your relations, your companions are daily dropping into the grave. You yourselves, perhaps, are only a few paces distant from the same term. The days which have already flown over your head are like a

dream, a vapour which has disappeared, and left no trace behind. The days you have yet to live will disappear in the same manner, and leave your hands as empty as the former have done.——Why not, then, take advantage of the present moment? You have numberless crimes to expiate; why not accept the mercies of the Lord, now that they are offered to you? Time is now at your disposal: delay not, for, ere long, time will be no more. Your experience of the vanity of the world, and of all its fleeting pleasures, has long since convinced you that happiness was not to be found in its embraces: you have discovered that sin, although decked in the most alluring charms, is invariably accompanied by anxiety, remorse, and misery.——On what pretexts, therefore, do you defer the reformation of your lives? Have they not been sufficiently criminal to induce the necessity of an immediate

change? Do you expect that your chains will break asunder of themselves? Do you wait for an opportunity of doing penance without any labour or expence? Do you intend to delay this great work till you are stretched on the bed of death, on the supposition that the sentiments of fear, which will then agitate your souls, will expiate the sins of your whole lives? Or, have you renounced the hopes of salvation, like the impious who know not God? Ah! beloved Christians, if you had only once been so unfortunate as to fall into mortal sin, a whole life would not have been too much to have devoted to tears and repentance. Defiled as you are with numberless transgressions, can you refuse to consecrate to God the small portion that remains? To-morrow your soul will be demanded of you; and will you dispute with God the small space that intervenes? Too happy ought you to

esteem yourselves, that the Lord in his mercy will condescend to accept this small remnant; that he deigns to stretch out his fatherly hand to you after so long, so dismal a shipwreck; and that he is ready to embrace and receive you into favour, although so disfigured, and defiled by sin?

2. Recollect, moreover, that by deferring your conversion at this time, you renounce all the merit arising from the due observance of Lent. You fast; but what will your fast avail you, if you forsake not your evil ways? What fruit will you gather from your abstinence, from our instructions, and from the penitential exercises of this time, if you break not your chains asunder, if you arise not from the deep abyss into which you have fallen? The Lord requires in the first instance a change of heart; and if you refuse him this, neither prayer, nor fasting, nor

alms will be entitled to any merit in his sight.

Should there, however, be any in this assembly who refuse to turn to the Lord at this holy time, I would not be understood to advise them to neglect the law of fasting, under the pretence that the observance of the letter is of no avail to the obstinate sinner: for this would be to advise them to take part with the impious at once. No: dearly beloved, far be it from me. My advice is, that since God continues to invite you to holiness and justice; since he still stretches out his hand to raise you like Lazarus from the grave, and perhaps has decreed that this present Lent should witness the reformation of your lives, and a happy termination of all your miseries and crimes: my advice, I say, is, that you enter the lists courageously with the just, and that it be your earnest desire to fight, not as

beating the air, to run, not as running in vain. By this means, your observance of the letter will be a step, at least, towards a change of life—a preparation for the grace of God; by this means you will unite yourselves exteriorly with the just; you will testify your fear of disobeying God; you will express your respect for his laws; you will pay homage to religion; in a word, you will have some reason to hope that, ere long, you will enter the gates of mercy.—But we will pass on to the motives arising from the cross of Jesus, and the examples of the saints.

3. The cross is the only inheritance bequeathed by Christ to his Church. Our union with him in heaven depends on our suffering with him on earth, 2 *Tim.* ii. 22. This is the spirit of our vocation, and the foundation of our hope. This alone distinguishes us from the idolatrous nations who know not Christ. Take away from the mo-

rality of the gospel, the maxims of the cross, self-denials, humility, the renouncing of our own will, and a thorough contempt of the world, and of all its fleeting pleasures; and we might have learnt the rest from the philosophers, whose doctrines abounded with moral precepts, and inculcated the necessity of a strict guard against vice and excess.

The cross, therefore, of Jesus, properly constitutes the grand characteristic of a Christian, and is the great road to salvation, which he has marked out to his disciples.——I say, the cross of *Jesus:* for the world has its crosses; our passions have their crosses; and we possess the art of forming to ourselves crosses of various kinds, that are purely imaginary. These, however, are the crosses of concupiscence. They are the punishments due to our passions, and not the remedies of our crimes. They are the sad consequences of vice,

and not the rewards of virtue. And yet, we submit to them all; but, from the cross of Jesus, we turn away with precipitation and disgust. We refuse to suffer any thing for his sake: we neither resist our passions, our humours, our caprices, nor make the sacrifice of our disorderly inclinations or unlawful pleasures. We carry the cross of our passions, the cross of our discontents, the cross of our hatred and envy; that is to say, the cross of the world and of the devil, and we attempt not to ease ourselves of the load. Alas! the cross of Christ is pleasant, and much lighter, and we throw it from us! the cross of Christ imparts happiness to those who carry it, and sweetens the crosses of the world, and we will not give it the preference! the cross of Christ is the price of eternity, and we think it beneath our notice!

What infatuation is this! How long shall we be the dupes of our own illu-

sions, and shut our eyes to the light of heaven? Why will we not be convinced that the Lord sweetens the yoke we carry for his sake? We have experienced that the yoke of the world is a yoke of iron, which overpowers and destroys: we believe that the wages of sin are death; and why will we not believe that the grace of God is everlasting life?

4. Ah! be no longer deceived: open your eyes to the light which the Sun of Justice throws around you. Now is the time to arise from sleep. The graces which flow from the cross during this season, offer you resources, which you may not perhaps enjoy at another time. The example of the whole Church invites you, and the prayers of all the elect are offered up in your behalf. The saints crucify their flesh by fasting and retirement; and their voice, like the voice of innocent blood, ascends to the throne of God,

not to solicit his judgments, but to draw down his mercies. Be not, then, discouraged by the idea of difficulties: but have confidence, and good will. If the corporal mortifications of Judith alone in Israel, reconciled the Lord with his people, and averted the effects of his just indignation, what may you not expect from so many faithful souls, who, in every quarter of the globe, offer up their prayers and austerities to heaven for the pardon of your sins? What may you not expect from so many holy pastors, who contribute their supplications and labours to gain you to Christ?—from so many pious solitaries, —from so many chaste virgins, who, in the recesses of their retreat, mourn like the dove, and endeavour to disarm the anger of the Lord, and change the thunders of his vengeance into the mild dews of benediction and grace?

Every assistance, my dear friends, is

offered you. And will you still refuse to enter into the bosom of the clemency of your God? Will you oppose the efforts with which the whole Church endeavours to recall you to a more christian and holy life? Are you obstinately bent on perishing, at the time that the whole congregation of the just are stretching out their hands to save you from shipwreck? —— What more can the Lord do for you? He tortures you with remorse of conscience, and you resist the motions of his grace. He offers you the abundant resources of religion, and you refuse their aid. He unites in your favour the prayers of all his elect, and you render them useless by your obstinate impenitence. He proclaims, by the mouth of his ministers, the promises and the threats of his law, and they are effaced from your minds the moment they are pronounced. What more can he do for you? The only remaining

access to your heart is punishment. He must chastise you. He must execute the threats of his indignation. This is his last resource. He has spoken in vain: now he must strike, in order to compel you to listen to his voice.

5. Having, therefore, filled up the measure of our iniquities, he has at length poured out the bitter chalice of his wrath on our guilty heads. He has abandoned his inheritance; he has delivered up the kingdoms of Christianity to the rage of our mortal enemy, the prince of darkness. He has permitted the dissemination of the most pernicious principles, of doctrines the most destructive of society, of harmony, of peace, and of all our beloved worldly enjoyments. He has permitted the flames of war to ravage nations, and destroy kingdoms. He has not spared even the seat of Christianity itself. He has empowered misery, wretchedness, and want, to fix their empire on the

ruins of prosperity, happiness, and abundance; and to heap their horrid gifts with profusion on their devoted subjects.

Yes, beloved friends, his wrath has burst over our heads. The enormity of our crimes has ascended to the tribunal of his justice. He has looked down from his high sanctuary, says the prophet, (*Ps.* ci. 20.) and he has beheld the faithful without morals, the nobility without religion, the ministers of the altar without piety, and the fairest of our creation without chastity, and without modesty.

He has looked down from his high sanctuary, and he has beheld adulteries, fornications, blasphemy, and impiety, honoured and applauded in the midst of his people; rapines and injustice covered with the specious title of lawful gain and traffic; the most extravagant excesses authorized by the example of the great; and profusion

and luxury every where increasing with public calamities.

He has looked down from his high sanctuary, and he has beheld the corruption of the whole human race. He has seen them bend their servile knee to mammon, and offer up their sighs and tears, their prayers and supplications at the unhallowed shrine of the golden calf: he has seen the false deity, the molten god, the object of universal adoration. He has seen religion despised, and treated as the lowest weakness; and the few that still continue to pay their adoration to him, he has seen coming to him with divided hearts, and confining their worship to mere exterior homage, to a few prayers pronounced with their lips, whilst their minds are given up to tepidity, to sensuality, to hatred, animosity, and discontent. In a word, he has seen himself dethroned from the hearts

of his people, and faith almost banished from the earth.

He has, therefore, discharged the cup of his indignation and wrath on the earth: he has let loose the implacable spirits, war, pestilence, and famine, to ravage the whole christian world.

And what use have we made of these public chastisements? What measures have we taken to disarm the anger of the Lord? We render ourselves more criminal by our complaints, impatience, and discontent; and we neither lament, nor do penance for our murders, our sorceries, our fornications, and our thefts!

Good God! how shall I endure the scrutiny of thy justice! What hast thou not done for my salvation? and what have I not done to obstruct the effect of thy mercies?——Thou hast exerted every means to preserve thy

creature from destruction: Thou hast invited him by thy graces and inspirations; Thou hast stimulated him by anguish of mind, by thwarting his passions, by disappointing his hopes; Thou hast endeavoured to compel him by calamities both public and private: Thou hast moreover formed his heart for goodness; Thou hast instilled into it sentiments of virtue and uprightness —sentiments, which made him shudder at impiety and excess, which incessantly chided him in secret for his shameful weaknesses, and importuned him to return to Thee. My God! what reply shall I make, covered as I am with thy benefits, and with my own ingratitude?——Lord, cease not to stretch out thy hand to my relief. Thou hast already done too much, to suffer thy creature to perish without aid. The more unworthy I am of new favours, the more will I hope in Thee. The wretchedness of my state

increases my confidence, and the excess of my miseries is the only title on which I claim thy eternal mercies.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT.

ON INCONSTANCY IN THE WAYS OF VIRTUE.

And the last state of that man becometh worse than the first. . . . Luke xi. 26.

THIS parable of the impure spirit is, according to St. Chrysostom, a mystical prophecy of our Saviour, denouncing the final reprobation of the Jews, and the evils which were, in a short time, to befal Jerusalem. He seems to describe the wretched state to which that ungrateful city was so frequently reduced by the sins of their fathers, and to display the excess of his mercies in as frequent-

ly hastening to her relief. Hence, he leaves them to conclude, that Jerusalem will so often relapse into her infidelity, that God will at length entirely forsake her; and her last state will become worse than the first.

Let us apply this parable to ourselves. We, like the unfaithful Jerusalem, have been oftentimes delivered from the impure spirit; and as often have we again opened the doors of our hearts to him: we have oftentimes bewailed our offences; and as often have we dried up our tears by a repetition of the same crimes: we have oftentimes been disgusted with the world and its follies, and then we returned to the Lord; the next day, disgusted with piety, we demanded back our hearts, and restored them to the world: our whole lives have been a continued succession of confessions and relapses.—After so many ineffectual attempts, therefore, we have every reason to fear that God

will at length entirely forsake us, and that our last state will become worse than the first.—Perhaps you may ask me, in what consists the danger of this state? We are not extortioners; we are not unjust; we are not adulterers: we fast; we frequent the sacraments; we are not like the rest of men; why then should we fear that the Lord will abandon us? Is he rendered more inexorable by the *few* sins which we commit, than by the *multiplied enormities* of others? I answer, that the resources which have frequently wrought the conversion of the most abandoned sinners, are too weak to complete the reformation of the fickle and inconstant Christian; and that of all characters, the character of inconstancy is the most remote from salvation. This truth I will endeavour to establish in this discourse.

1. Although the spirit of God breathes where he will, and can, by in-

numerable means, draw the rebellious heart of man to himself; although he can work a change in the minds of the most voluptuous, and turn their schemes of pleasure into plans of repentance; there is, nevertheless, a class of men who have frustrated all the merciful designs of Providence, and of whose salvation, consequently, little hopes can be entertained.

This class is composed of those unsteady and fickle Christians, who are virtuous and worldly by turns; who relapse into their former crimes as often as they repent of them; who are, at one time, full of zeal for the honour and glory of God; and at another, full of ardour in the pursuit of vanity and pleasure.

Of the salvation of this numerous class of people, I say, little hope can be entertained. St. Paul says in express terms, that *it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, have tasted also the heavenly gifts, and were made*

partakers of the Holy Ghost, have moreover tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, and are fallen away, to be again renewed to penance! Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6. Candour, indeed, obliges me to acknowledge, that by the word *impossible*, is meant, not an absolute impossibility in the sight of God, for the examples of David and St. Peter are proofs of the contrary, but only, that it is impossible to be renewed to penance, by the ordinary means employed by Providence for reclaiming sinners. This position I will prove by a few conclusive arguments.

The first method employed by the Providence of God to withdraw the sinner from the evil of his ways, is to infuse into his soul a clear knowledge of the truth. — The children of the world are immersed in the shades of darkness; they are ignorant of the great duties of religion; they know not that their maxims are false, their pre-

judices unfounded, their customs dangerous and sinful. The moment, therefore, that the light of truth bursts upon their sight, they are struck with amazement; they awake, as it were, from a profound sleep; they are astonished to find that they are ignorant of the only thing which it behoved them to know; they are startled at the sight of the precipice, on the brink of which they had been sleeping. These first agitations of the soul are seconded by the powerful attractions of grace, and a sudden and permanent conversion is frequently the effect.

This plentiful source of benedictions, however, is closed to the inconstant Christian; or rather, it has been frequently opened to him, and his inconstancy has always prevented its effect.—He has oftentimes been enlightened, and as often has he replunged into darkness: he has oftentimes seen the error of his ways, and the danger

to which his salvation is exposed, and as often has he stilled the tumults of his breast by a few works of piety, and returned to his former habits. — The first time, indeed, that the light of truth flashed on his soul, he felt the agitations which I have described; he was for a time fervent, and repentant. But now, that he has so often turned his back on his God, the returns of light are like the glimmerings of an expiring taper, the gleam is momentary and faint; it enlightens not his soul; he can barely discern the gross defilements of more heinous sins, and he vainly imagines that he removes them by a mechanical reception of the sacraments.

Much better would it have been, says an apostle, *if he had never known the way of justice, than after having known it, to turn back,* 2 Pet. ii. 21.—The Jews, on their return from captivity, melted into tears, when the book of the law,

of which they had been so long deprived, was publicly read by the prophet Esdras. They struck their breasts, they dismissed their unlawful wives, and they regulated their conduct according to its maxims; so powerful is the force of truth not abused. But the daily lecture of this same law occasioned, in process of time, not a reform of conduct, but a hardness of heart. In the same manner, the most enlightened sinners, now a days, are generally the most incorrigible: they are familiar with every argument with which we enforce the necessity of repentance; they will speak with a flow of eloquence on the vanities of the world, and on the importance of salvation. But the knowledge of the truth seems to increase their tranquillity: they are veterans in the warfare against God; and, vainly supposing that it will be, at any time, as easy to love the truth, as it is to know the truth, they remain delibe-

rately obstinate in the ways of sin; till at length they are surprised by the unexpected summons of the Almighty to render an account of their stewardship. ——Depend upon it, my friends: there is every reason to be alarmed for the salvation of these enlightened sinners, who know every thing, and who practise nothing. Yes: *it is impossible for those who have been enlightened, and who are fallen away, to be again renewed to penance.*

2. In the second place, sinners are frequently reclaimed by *the taste of the heavenly gift of virtue,* which always accompanies the beginnings of wisdom; and by the joy which arises in the soul when she is first disengaged from the enormous load of guilt, and in possession of the sweets of peace and innocence. Ah! dear Christians, nothing can exceed the pious transports of the soul, which after having been buried in the loathsome sink of vice,

begins to breathe the pure air of piety, and to taste the delights of love. *Thou hast broken my bonds asunder,* exclaims the penitent David in an extasy of delight: how happy am I to be of the number of thy servants! how glorious is it to reckon amongst my ancestors one only soul who has been faithful to Thee—more glorious than a long list of potentates and conquerors! *I am thy servant, O Lord, and the son of thy handmaid,* Ps. cxv.

These are the first attractions of grace, and these are its effects on the soul which has never before experienced the force of love, or tasted how sweet is the Lord.—But, as for the inconstant Christian, who has so often been in love with piety, and as often returned to his former pleasures, what new source of enjoyment can he open by a change of life, of which he has not already tasted too often?—Ah! if he had a heart of steel, it might be

softened by grace, and made susceptible of retaining its impression. But, as the prophet says, he has a heart of wax, susceptible of every impression, and incapable of retaining any: one impression obliterates the former, and the last that is made keeps full possession till it is succeeded by another. He is fervent in his fits of devotion, and when these are past, he is solely bent on sensual gratifications: his love is centered in God during the moments of compunction, and when these are elapsed, the world alone can satisfy his desires.

If this unhappy man could be convinced of his danger, he would indeed tremble. Our Lord himself says, that *whoever putteth his hand to the plough, and looketh back, is not fit for the kingdom of God,* Luke ix. 62. He does not say, that he loseth his title to the kingdom of God, or that he exposeth himself to the danger of being

excluded from it; but he is not *fit* for the kingdom of God; that is to say, that his inclinations and dispositions, both of mind and body, render him *unfit* for completing the great work of salvation. When we say that a man is not *fit* for any particular state of life, for the church for instance, for the army, or for the law; we mean that his natural and acquired dispositions are such as to preclude every probability of success in that state. In the same state does our Lord say, that of all characters, the character of inconstancy is the most *unfit for the kingdom of God*, Luke ix. 62.

The hardened, the obdurate sinner may be softened into repentance by the unctions of grace: Manasses in chains adores the true God, whose altars he had overturned: the publican does penance; Zacheus restores his ill-gotten goods; Magdalen washes away her defilements at the feet of Jesus: but

an Achab, a Sedeceas, who, at one time, covered themselves with sackcloth and ashes, and at another, wallowed in the mire of sin; who, at one time, were obedient to the instructive and inspired voice of the prophets and ministers of God, and at another, studied to heap the most outrageous insults on their venerable heads; ah! the scriptures no where inform us that they died penitent: no, their levity, their inconstancy rendered them *unfit for the kingdom of God.*

'My friends; in order to be a true Christian, a constant disciple of the crucified Jesus, a man must possess a resolute mind: he must know how to choose, and how to abide by his choice: he must not be impeded by obstacles: he must be guided, not by inclination, but by the rules of the gospel. There must be that something great, elevated, and noble in his character, which exalts the mind above vulgar prejudices

and ideas, and enriches it with true wisdom. He must be separated from the company of the inconstant, who, in the words of St. Jude, may be compared to clouds without water, which are driven about by the winds; to wandering stars, which have no fixed course; to the raging sea, which casts from its bosom the lifeless corpse, and by the next swell of its waves swallows it up again.

3. In the third place, the repenting sinner is confirmed in his resolutions by the sacraments. The awful solemnity of the tribunal of penance, the shame and confusion occasioned by the declaration of his crimes, make an impression on his mind which is not easily effaced. —— But what advantage does the inconstant Christian derive from this plentiful and last resource? Do these things make an impression on him? No: he is familiarized with confusion; he is hardened

against impression: he changes the waters of life into waters of malediction; he profanes the sacraments.

Yes, I say, he profanes the sacraments; and I appeal to your candour for the truth of my assertion. Can it be said that the man who is constantly sinning and constantly repenting; who rises up from the unclean bed of vice, merely to shake himself and lay down again; who says, *I have sinned,* in order to sin again with greater freedom; can it be said, that such a man is received every time into favour, and made acceptable to God? Ought it not rather to be said, that he mocks, that he insults the Almighty, and that he receives the sacraments to his greater condemnation?

I pretend not, however, to insinuate that a worthy participation of the sacraments will fix the soul unchangeably in a state of justification; or, that we must conclude that we have been

guilty of a profanation, if we fall again into our former sins. But my object is, to prove that the man who is truly justified in the sight of God, retains the deep impression for a length of time; and if he falls again, that he falls not immediately, but continues steadfast until time and repeated temptations have obliterated the impression, —until many trivial faults have led him on by degrees to the fatal precipice; for no one passes on a sudden from a state of justice to a state of sin.

A true conversion is not the work of a moment. It requires floods of tears, long prayers, painful self-denials, and perseverance in good works. Now, what a person has acquired with such difficulty and labour, he will not easily part with: he will not on a sudden pass from a state of justice to a state of sin.

A true conversion is a work of firm-

ness and solidity. It forms the sinner into a new creature; it changes the inclinations; it renews the whole man; it builds the house upon a rock. Now, the first breath of temptation cannot destroy that which is capable of withstanding the violence of the united elements. The house that falls as soon as the waves beat, and the winds blow, is built on quick sand.

A true conversion is the work of thought. A person deliberates before he undertakes it — he hesitates, he trembles — he shrinks — he wills, and he wills not — he reckons up the obstacles, and calculates their effects — he is lost in the multitude and variety of his reflections. Now, a work that is undertaken after such mature consideration, certainly will not be abandoned in an instant.

A great change, therefore, must be wrought, when the sinner is duly prepared for the sacrament, and really ab-

solved in the sight of God You, therefore, of my present hearers, who are addicted to mortal sin, you may conclude, that, if you are the same after confession as you were before; if you are as eager in the same criminal pursuits; if you feel the same repugnance to fasts, watchings, prayer, and retirement; if you take no precautions to guard against future sins; you, I say, may conclude, that as the finger of God is not visible in your conversion, the devil is not cast out of your soul. No; my God! when thou recallest a sinner from his evil ways, the effects of thy grace are durable; it is not received and forfeited again almost at the same moment.

For this reason, the pretended repentance of these inconstant souls has been always treated by the saints as public insults offered to the most sacred mysteries of religion. They forbad them to approach the altar, they consi-

dered them as unclean, before whom it was unlawful to throw the pearls of the Sanctuary—the Holy of Holies. They even suspected the reality of that Christian's repentance who relapsed only once into his former sins. This, however, would be an excess of severity in these times; an excess, as detrimental to religion, by deterring the faithful from their duty, as a criminal compliance would be in admitting all indiscriminately.—It is, nevertheless, an indubitable truth, that the body of the Lord should not be given to those who have repeatedly profaned it; that reliance should not be placed on promises which have been repeatedly broken; that absolution should not be pronounced, when there is every probability that it will draw down the maledictions of heaven, and strengthen the bad habits of the false penitent, instead of procuring his discharge from God.

Of all characters, therefore, my be-

loved friends, the character of inconstancy is the most *unfit* for the kingdom of heaven. Hardened sinners, as I said above, are frequently converted by the means I have described. But these means are insufficient to procure the same effect on the inconstant. Extraordinary means are necessary; and extraordinary means are seldom resorted to by the Almighty.--This class of men, nevertheless, are of all others the least aware of their dangerous state. They are lulled into a false security by the sentiments of piety which, from time to time, accompany them to the altar. The unbounded licentiousness of so many, in the present age, who live without God, without religion, without sacraments, sets off to advantage their exterior pious, and regular deportment. They are satisfied, because they are not yet arrived to the same pitch of irreligion and immorality. They applaud themselves, because they are regular at

the place of worship, and frequent the sacraments. They thank God in their hearts, like the Pharisee, *that they are not like the rest of men,* Luke xviii. 11. This comparison flatters their pride, and increases their false security; whereas their whole religion, their whole piety, is no more than the reiterated profanation of the most tremendous mysteries of the Deity.

If there are any in this assembly, who live in these alternatives of grace and sin; who will neither renounce their passions, nor their devotions; let me entreat them to come to a determination. You cannot serve both God and Baal. If Baal be your God, as a prophet said to the Jews, follow him; but if the Lord be your God, adore him alone. Why these pleasures, and these tears? Either dry up your tears, and receive your consolation in this world; or seek that consolation, that pleasure alone which proceeds from virtue and

innocence. Have pity on your own souls: come to a determination: fix a solid peace in your interior: embrace the mercies of God, which are offered you at this time.—Perhaps your inconstancy is hastening to a fatal conclusion. Enter, therefore, the paths of virtue without delay; fix the foundation of your new building on the firm basis of charity; and be no longer like those men, of whom our Lord speaks, who believed in him only for a time. By this means, you will be entitled to the crown of glory and immortality in heaven, which is promised to all who persevere faithfully to the end.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT.

ON CONFESSION.

Confess your sins one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be saved. . . . . James v. 16.

ON the preceding Sundays, my beloved brethren, I enlarged on the great, and manifold duties, which are imposed on you at this time: I described the extent of, and the necessity of complying with the precept of fasting: I admonished you, that the law is not confined to the exterior mortification of the flesh, but that you must rend your hearts, and be converted to the Lord by a true, and sincere reformation of life: and

lastly I guarded you against the dangers of inconstancy, in order that your repentance might be permanent and effectual.—I will, now, enter upon the second part of my instructions for this time, and explain to you at large the preparation which is required for a worthy participation of the sacred mysteries at the conclusion of this season. I will begin with the sacrament of penance, and it shall form the subject of this, and the following discourse.

It is not my intention to enter into a controversial discourse on the institution of this sacrament, because such a disquisition would be unnecessary before a catholic audience. But I propose to discuss the conditions, on the due and faithful performance of which the whole fruit of the sacrament depends. This, perhaps, may appear, at first sight, as unnecessary as the subject of its institution, on account of the instructions which you

have continued to receive on that head even from your childhood. But if you reflect on the many times you have presented yourselves at the sacred tribunal, and the little fruit that you have hitherto reaped, you must conclude that there are some deficiencies on your part; and that it is the duty of the pastor to scrutinize them, and to prescribe the remedies. On the part of God there can be no deficiency: the blood of Jesus is as powerful now, as at any former period. All the defects, therefore, must be laid entirely to your charge, and in compliance with my duty I will examine them, and lay before you the means of effecting their cure.——I shall reduce them to three heads, by observing, first, that you either acquire not a perfect knowledge of the state of your interior; or secondly, that you confess not your sins with sufficient candour, and explicitness; or lastly, that you are deficient

in the most indispensable part, which is that of contrition.

1. Man, generally speaking, is a mystery to himself. Being influenced in all his decisions, and guided in all his actions by self-love, he always views his own conduct on the most favourable side; and is generally the last person who discovers the faults, into which this deceitful prompter has beguiled him.

This fatal ignorance of the true state of our souls can be dispelled only by two means; first, by a deliberate and attentive examination of our conscience; and secondly, by a strict attention to the relative duties of our state.

In the first place, the whole life of a Christian ought to be devoted to self-examination. We must scrutinize every thought; every word; every action: we must not desist even for one hour. For we experience such a con-

tinual and rapid succession of desires, of jealousies, of fears, of hopes, of troubles, of hatred, and love, that if the thread is but once broken in our recollection, we are instantly lost: if we cease for an instant to follow the secret windings of the passions in our souls, we know neither their extent nor their consequences: all is confusion on account of the multiplicity of things; our conscience is formed into an abyss which we cannot fathom; the surface alone is open to our view.

It is an error, therefore, to suppose that, after a long time spent in tepidity, and in a dissipated and worldly life, an hour or two spent in examination is sufficient to discover the true state of your interior. You must be habituated to give a daily account of yourselves to your own souls: you must enter into judgment on every action; if not frequently in the day, at least, during the silence of the

night, after the labours, fatigues, and pastimes of the day are concluded; you must, like the Royal Prophet, (*Ps.* cxviii. 109.), place your souls in your hands before the Lord, and weigh in his sight every action that you have performed. By this means alone, can you be familiarized with yourselves, and be disposed to carry to the sacred tribunal hearts that have been already judged.

But, is it in this manner that you prepare yourselves for the sacrament of penance? The generality of Christians live in such a state of dissipation that they dare not look into their own hearts: the closet of their interior is a place of melancholy and sadness, from which they fly with precipitation; they dread the idea of being left alone to their own reflections: they avoid with solicitude every thought about their past disorders. You, perhaps, my beloved, are

of this unhappy number, and therefore I will ask you; whether it is possible that, in the space of one hour, you should be able to explore the intricate windings of your passions? Whether it is possible that so many unjust desires, so many criminal indulgences, so much tepidity, so many distractions, so many compliances with self-will, so many injurious words, so many reflections on your neighbours, such frequent hatreds and animosities, so many sinful thoughts, so many crimes which you have occasioned in others, the greatest part of which were sedulously erased from your mind almost as soon as committed. Whether it is possible, I say, that such an abyss should be so suddenly enlightened, and that such a disordered state of conscience, to which you have hitherto been strangers, should so suddenly be made known, and become, as it were, familiar to you?

That such a thing is impossible you must readily acknowledge, consequently you yourselves must draw this conclusion; that the person who neglects the sacrament of penance for any length of time, and is inattentive to the daily examination of his conscience, must necessarily be deficient in the knowledge of his interior, and ought to attribute, in part, to this cause the little fruit which he has hitherto reaped from his confessions.

I must observe, likewise, that a very notable defect arises from another quarter: you examine not the sins you commit in relation to the various capacities in which you stand: as a parent, for instance,—as a private individual,—as a tradesman,—as a servant, and so on: you attend only to personal failings in general terms, and omit the relative duties of your state and calling.

As parents, you are bound to con-

sider your children, not as properly belonging to you, but as a sort of trust committed to your care by the providence of God. Him you are to consider as their Father, and yourselves, as merely occupying, for a time, the place of guardians.

The duties of this guardianship are manifold, and great. It is incumbent on you to bring them up in the fear and love of their heavenly Father; to prevent their entrance into the broad road of the world; to lead them by the hand into the narrow path of virtue, and piety; to convince them of the vanity, and emptiness of all things here below; and to warm their innocent bosoms with the flames of charity, and divine love. These are your duties in quality of parents—duties which are indispensable, and incommutable. Nevertheless, how many are there, who confine their solicitude for their children to earthly things;

who leave the task of instructing them in piety to their pastors, and then frustrate by their own example the instructions which they have received; who invite, and even force them to take part with the world, at the time that they commission their directors to solicit them to take part with Jesus; how many, I say, are there of this description! and how few who make this the subject of their examination!—Again, you have many duties to perform in respect to your servants. You are their father, and pastor, as long as they are under your command: and if you neglect their spiritual welfare, you become, as the scripture expresses it, worse than infidels: and do you ever examine yourselves on this head?

Moreover, as members of the body of the faithful, you owe to your brethren the example of an edifying, and irreprehensible life. The more exalted you are, the stricter is the obligation;

because your example is either more efficacious, or more pernicious in proportion to your rank.—As members of the true Church, it is a duty incumbent on you, to shine like lights to those who sit in the shades of error, and infidelity; to display before them, by the purity of your lives, the holiness of your religion; and to convince them, if possible, of the truth of your faith, by your strict adherence to the rules of the gospel. But where are the Catholics whose lives are stricter, whose morals are more evangelical, whose example is more edifying than that of their unbelieving brethren? And yet, this subject never enters into their examination.

Again, if you are engaged in business, you are bound to follow the strictest line of justice; to be scrupulous in your dealings; and, if in trade, to see that all the orders which you receive are properly exe-

cuted, and that every article, in point of durability and real worth, is answerable to the price you set upon it, and to the intentions of your employer.—If you are in service, you are bound to be exact in the performance of your duties; to avoid extravagance, and waste; to confine your perquisites within the bounds of allowance; and neither to give away, nor to assume to yourselves more than the will of your master has consented to.—These are your duties, and these must all form a part of your examination. But, alas! after you have read over the catalogue of sins in your prayer books, you conclude that your examination has been sufficiently minute? Although you enter into a new state, although it may happen that your obligations are increased, that you are entrusted with five talents, instead of two, or one, your examination is still the same as it was before.—Ah! this is

not acting like disciples of Jesus: this is not judging yourselves as you will hereafter be judged.

The just man is minute in every point; he approaches to the sacred tribunal with fear, and trembling; he accuses himself in the bitterness of his soul of the smallest imperfections; he discovers even in his works of piety matter for accusation, and causes for penance; he is afraid that the involuntary feelings of nature were free acts of his will; he imagines that he discovers in the first motions to sin, the guilt of having fully consented to it, although at the very time he acquired merit, by an immediate resistance; he is diffident even of the experience of his director, when he endeavours to expel his fears; and, like St. Peter in the excess of his prayer at Joppa, he fancies that he beholds objects forbidden by the law, even when an angel from heaven con-

demns his scruples, and commands him to eat.

And whence arises this difference? The one keeps a constant watch over his heart; the other neglects examination till he commences his preparation for confession. The one judges himself according to the maxims of the gospel; the other is influenced by the prejudices of self-love. The one examines himself strictly on all the duties of his state; the other looks no farther than to the open violations of the law, of which he knows neither the extent, nor the consequences. It is thus, O God, that thou enlightenest the hearts of the just, and that thou punishest the crimes of the worldling by permitting him to conceal them from his own eyes.

2. The second general defect, is a want of sincerity in the confession of our sins.—Nothing is more repugnant to the nature of man, than the acknow-

ledgement of guilt. Pride is his predominant passion, and therefore, being conscious of innumerable failings, and dreading the confusion which would attend their publicity, he has recourse to artifice and dissimulation in order to conceal them from the eyes of others.

This is his nature. But how truly deplorable is it, that this pride should influence him even in his acts of humiliation; and that he should carry his dissimulation even to the foot of that great tribunal, where he presents himself on purpose to declare the secrets of his conscience, and to judge himself before Christ.

I allow, indeed, that few Christians are so far abandoned, as to come with a determined resolution of lying to the Holy Ghost. To people of this description, instructions would be of little service: the thunders of the Al-

mighty alone could rouse them: the language of St. Peter to Ananias, and Sapphira, would be the only language calculated to make an impression on their hearts.

But there is a dissimulation of a different kind; a dissimulation, which endeavours to palliate, and sometimes to excuse entirely the sins confessed. Of this dissimulation we are guilty when we endeavour to expose our sins in the most favourable light; when we are solicitous to extenuate their enormity in the eyes of our director; when we confess our greatest crimes in the fewest words, in order to avoid enquiries; when we pass over in silence circumstances, and incidents which increase the sin, and which are, sometimes, more criminal than the sins themselves; and when, instead of entering into a minute explication, we substitute vague, and general expres-

sions, which declare the actions, but which expose not the true state of our interior.

My friends, the language of a contrite heart is an humble, simple, natural, sincere language. It is a stranger both to dissimulation, and forced excuses. It explains the beginning, the progress, the minutest circumstances, and the consequences of every crime. Instead of endeavouring to extenuate the guilt, it exposes it in the most odious colours before the minister of God.—But how little is this language known! How few in number are the Christians who confess their sins without dissimulation! If we confessed to man only, such an artifice would succeed; it would be easy to deceive a judge who could not penetrate the recesses of the mind. But we confess to Jesus Christ, who has been invisibly the witness of the whole history of our lives; who reads in our

hearts, as in an open book, the most hidden secrets, and who, at the time that we endeavour to impose on his minister by our hyprocrisy, laughs at the ridiculous efforts of our shame; and upbraids us, as the prophet upbraided the Queen of Israel who endeavoured to deceive him under a borrowed dress: "*why dost thou feign thyself to be another!* (*3 Kings* xiv. 6.) Senseless man! Dost thou think to conceal thy shame with a thin veil from the sight of Him, whose eye pierces the deepest abyss? Knowest thou not, that thou attemptest to hide thy desperate, and corrupted wounds from him, from whom alone thou canst expect a cure?".

We are guilty of dissimulation, in the second place, when we neglect to examine into the motives, and principles which occasioned our sins.—Religion informs us that the whole merit and demerit of every action de-

pend solely on the intentions, and dispositions of the heart. In order, therefore, to be fully acquainted with their nature, it is necessary that we trace them to their very source. If we are addicted, for instance, to calumny, and detraction, we must examine from whence this disposition takes it rise; whether it be from pride, envy, or avarice:—if to swearing, quarrelling, or hatred; whether it be attributable to the loss of the fear of God, or to a passionate, and revengeful temper:—if to intemperance, and sensuality; whether it proceeds from the spirit of irreligion, or from an inordinate attachment to earthly things:—if to the sins of the flesh, whether it originate from a rooted, and obstinate affection for those brutal pleasures, or from courting the company of the objects which excite them. —These are indispensable subjects of inquiry, and must be held in view through the whole course of our exa-

mination: otherwise we shall never acquire a competent knowledge of the extent either of our sins, or of the corruption of our hearts. If, therefore, we are negligent in this point, we are guilty of dissimulation, by voluntarily concealing the true state of our interior both from ourselves, and from the director of our consciences.

And yet how common is this dissimulation! and how serious are the consequences! Your confession is not succeeded by that peace, and serenity of mind, which attends a good confession: you feel that you are not disburdened of that heavy load of guilt which oppressed your souls: you continue to be the devoted victims of anxiety, and remorse: your hearts tell you that you are not at peace with God.

Senseless as you are! why will you foster in your breasts a serpent, which may so easily be dislodged? You

undergo the humiliation of confession; and by your insincerity, you deprive yourselves of its consolations. You publicly declare that you are sinners; and this declaration, which is so painful to human nature, becomes one of your greatest crimes.

Be no longer deceived, Christian brethren. Suffer not the enemy of your souls to impose on you by his delusive artifices. Your salvation depends on the worthily receiving the sacrament of penance. Arise, therefore, from the abyss. Subject every motion of your souls to a strict examination. Investigate minutely in what manner you perform the duties of your state, to what good purpose you employ the talents entrusted to you. Open your hearts without reserve to the minister of God. Display the true state of your interior before his eyes. Be not satisfied with a mere verbal declaration of your sins, but expose the causes;

lay open the root of the evil.—Then, if you are truly contrite, you will obtain the pardon of them; you will enjoy the consolations of penance; and you will receive grace to live holily and piously for the future.

END OF VOL. I.

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